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by ARTHUR O. FRIEL

MAY 1st ISSUE, 1929
VOL. LXX No. 4

ADVENTURE

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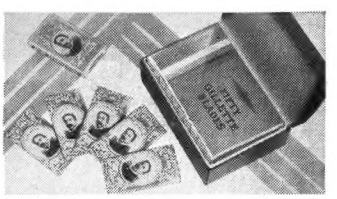

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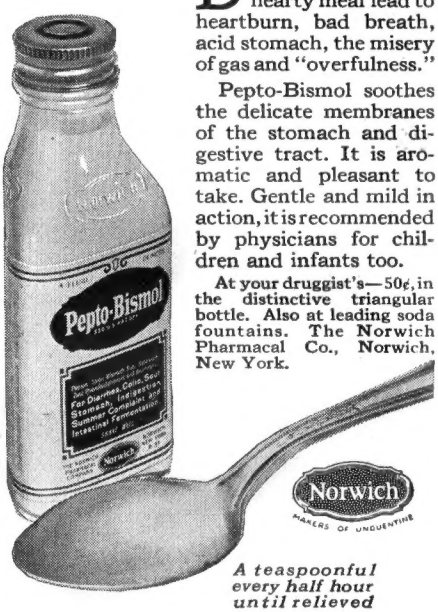

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ADVENTURE
May 1st, 1929

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Volume 70
Number 4

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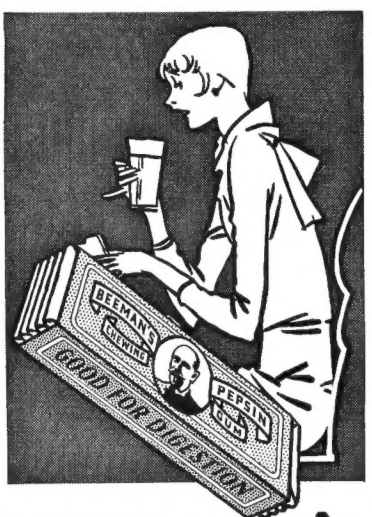

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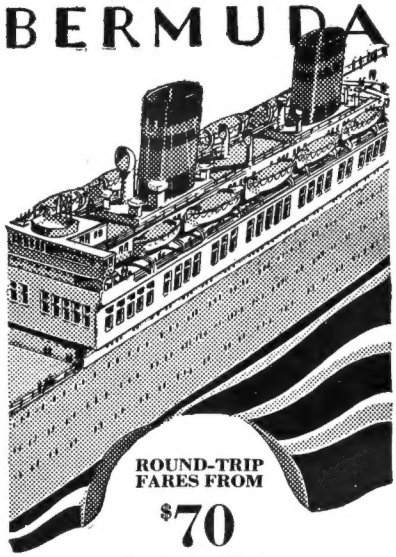

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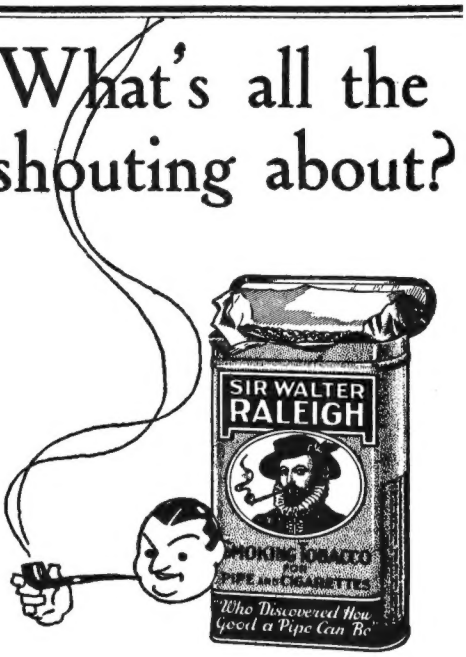

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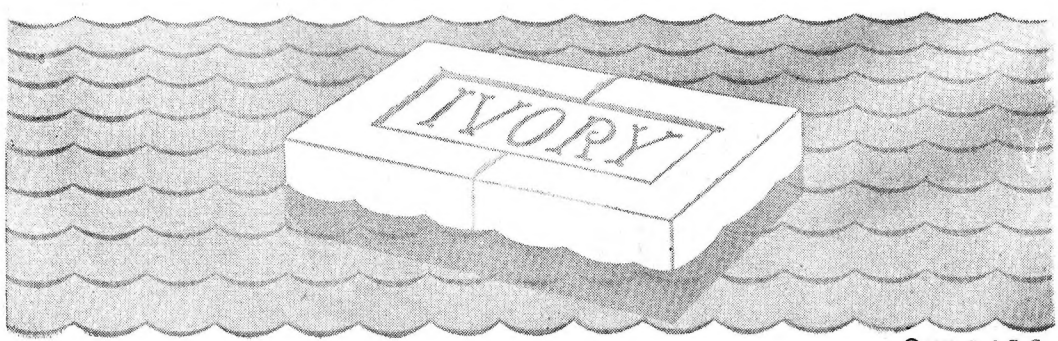

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Adventure

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CONFUSION *To The* ENEMY

THE PECOS RIVER debouches from New Mexico and meanders across Texas through a plains country to a junction with the Rio Grande. Westward from the Pecos, the Lone Star State thrusts a triangular tip between Old and New Mexico, with El Paso sitting at the apex of the triangle. And in this triangle there is a lot of rough mountain country, timbered country, chaparral slopes, mountain meadows, pine and cedar and various other trees. It is a pleasant country for both man and beast from the Davis Mountains up to the Huecos range, and eastward to the towering height of Guadalupe Peak.

But it was not a populous country, although it had plenty of grass and clear cold water, and stock did well there. With neither fence nor natural barriers, the longhorns drifted up there from the outlying plains. Brands that belonged on the lower Pecos could be found on the slopes of Guadalupe, even across Salt Basin and up to the Sierra Diablo, which may or may not have deserved its name. And men came riding up after such stock now and then to muster them back around home ranches, squatting out on some watercourse in the hot dry plains.

Which accounts for Mickey Clarke's presence in Few Trees.

Mickey was seventeen. He stood five feet ten in his boots. His hair was a tawny brown, his eyes gray with little brown glints around the pupils, and his mouth, though made for smiling, could shut tight and grim over white teeth. Mickey had grown up among men and he had a man's code and outlook, withal, a boy's exuberance.

He rode for his Uncle Ben. The Block C lay on the Pecos, a little above the mouth of Toyah Creek. That was the original Clarke location, made when the Apaches and Comanches were still be-

A Novelette of the Texas Range

By

BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR

deviling the Southwest. But the Clarke stock ranged far and wide in Texas, because old Ben had more cattle and horses than any one man really should own—and not alone in Texas. The Clarke interests reached across North America clear to the Canadian line. Old Ben had not accumulated wealth and power by neglecting details. He had a faculty for keeping men around him who overlooked nothing. So when the home ranch boss heard that Block C saddle stock had drifted away west into the Guadalupes, he sent Mickey to get them—sent a seventeen year old kid into one of the toughest regions of Texas in the year '83.

Mickey would have laughed if any one had doubted his ability to fill a man's boots anywhere in the cow country, whether in tame regions or wild. Mickey was not either a sedate or sober youth. He had of late been something of a trial to his Uncle Ben. Mickey could ride and shoot and had a flair for both pastimes. He had an ingrained, impudent sort of honesty. He did not fear any one or anything, even the consequences of his own occasional damfoolishness—which is a good deal for seventeen.

And old Ben, considering his nephew with middle aged wisdom, had told the major-domo of the home ranch to put Mickey through a course of sprouts that spring. Wherefore the man sent Mickey up into the Few Trees country, on the slopes of the Guadalupes.

"I understand there's thirty, forty head of ponies up there," said he. "You go get 'em. An' don't let no highbinder take 'em away from you after you got 'em bunched. And don't be all summer about it."

Mickey had not taken all summer. He had joined forces with an obliging horse outfit. Three weeks after he left the home ranch he came into Few Trees with thirty-eight clean limbed, well broken

Block C saddle horses, besides his own pack outfit. Clarke bred the best saddle stock in western Texas. They commanded a premium when they were for sale. They drew the selective eye of a horse-thief, now and then, too. This lot had drifted more than a hundred miles from home. And Mickey had them bunched and headed for the mouth of the Toyah when he came into Few Trees in the early dusk.

He penned them for the night in a sort of livery corral where hay was available, unsaddled, kicked off his chaps and spurs, hitched his gun belt tighter and swaggered away to a saloon with a thirst that was partly real and partly born of seventeen's instinct to act according to its environment. Afterward he proposed to eat. He would sleep in his blankets beside the corral. At dawn he would head out of the Guadalupes, down over high slopes that gave a look across lesser mountain ranges south to the Rio Grande.

FEW TREES had few trimmings. Mickey did not walk into the nearest saloon—he entered the only one. Just as there was only one eating place, one general store, one blacksmith shop—a typical range hamlet beside a stage road that ran from El Paso into an infinity of plains on the northeast. Riders and wagons passed up and down that road. Few Trees had a legitimate excuse for being.

Mickey signaled the bartender. In the cow country only sheepherders drink alone, and even they do not do so from choice. There were seven men in that saloon. Two stood conversing at the bar. The other five sat over stacks of red and white chips on a poker table. The bartender took Mickey's treat to them on a tray.

One twisted in his chair, hoisted his glass at Mickey. A big, dark man, young enough, but still ten years Mickey's senior. A handsome man, full faced, with a cruel mouth, if Mickey had known physiognomy. A small black mustache curved on his upper lip, and his hair was black and curled in tight little ringlets all over his head. He had a fine color and clear eyes, and shoulders like a wrestler.

"Here's confusion to the enemy, kid." He grinned at Mickey and downed his whisky.

"You're high, George," his neighbor said, and the other turned to squint at his hole card.

Mickey's drink sharpened the edge of a keen appetite. He sought the restaurant. Satisfied, he returned to the saloon. There was nowhere else to go. The stud game continued. Mickey drew up a chair to watch. Presently one man sat back.

"I'll sell my interest in this game for the makin's," he announced casually. "I ain't had enough, but I'm through."

Mickey handed him a sack of Durham and brown papers as he slipped into the vacant chair.

By eleven o'clock Mickey Clarke and George Dubois had cleaned the opposition. They buckled into it single handed for a time.

"You're too tough a game, kid," Dubois flattered him. "Let's call it a draw. We got all the money between us anyway. I'm buyin' a drink."

And when they stood up to the bar Dubois began again his little chant over the Bourbon whisky, of which several had passed down his gullet in the course of the evening, with no perceptible effect. He would hoist his glass aloft, look at the red liquor through narrowed eyes and say, "Well, here's confusion to the enemy."

For an hour Mickey kept pace with him. And always with each drink that curious toast came from Dubois' lips. Confusion to the enemy. It began to peal in Mickey's brain with constant iteration. And at last the man who had given Mickey his seat, a horse wrangler who had lost sixty dollars in the game and possibly mourned his vanished pesos, grew peevish with the repetition.

"Who-all is this enemy you are wishin' confusion on so regular?" he inquired.

Dubois' mouth tightened, as if a frost had hit his face.

"Anybody," he declared. "Anybody that wants to take it up. Nobody barred."

The horse wrangler stiffened. It was a good deal like a backhand slap in the face. He glared at Dubois. The color of his thought was reflected in his eyes. Such things began like that. A word, a look, a twisted smile. There was little subtlety about that sort of clash. Given a mixture of strong drink, arrogance on one side, resentment on the other, it was inevitable—where rights had less basis in law than in a bit of machined steel snuggled in a leather belt.

"I don't know as I like the way you talk, Mister Man," the horse wrangler said with cold deliberation. Others began to move unobtrusively aside. "Nor them curls of yours, nor your Mexican skin. You look like a would be bad man, to me."

"Would be?" Dubois sneered. "Just try me out—"

The horse wrangler's hand was coming up with a gun in it, Mickey clearly saw, when Dubois moved. He shifted like a boxer, drew and fired with a wicked smile, with a motion so incredibly swift that the other man's forefinger did not even press the trigger of his drawn gun.

No part of the South was altogether a tame country in those days. Nor was it frequented by tame men. Yet tragedy did not stalk about in seven league boots. Mickey Clarke knew all about gunmen and gunplay, as did any Texas youth born during the Civil War and growing to manhood with the aftermath and echo of that struggle to color his life. Nevertheless he stood a little chilled by that swift and ruthless climax to an otherwise pleasant evening.

Dubois backed slowly to the end of the bar. He held his gun ready. That wolf smile flickered about his full lips.

"I didn't go looking for trouble," he said softly. "But I sure don't ever aim to sidestep it. If anybody wants to take this up I'm still open for engagements."

No one spoke.

"Set 'em up, barkeep," Dubois said. "A farewell drink on me. This feller may have ambitious friends. I'm leavin' Few Trees while my health is good."

He stuck his gun back into the holster and laid a gold piece on the bar. The bartender filled glasses. But no one reached for them save Dubois for his own.

"Oho! Cold feet, eh?" he sneered.

"Have some *sabe*," one said. "We knowed this feller well. Who wants to drink with a dead man layin' at his feet?"

"I do," Dubois replied crisply. "I don't give a damn for no man, dead or alive!"

He lifted his glass, holding them with those keen dark eyes.

"Here's confusion to the enemy," he said.

He picked up his change and backed through the door. The breath of relief that went up was like a faint, half stifled sigh. They bent over the dead man.

"He didn't have a ghost of a chance, with an even break, against that feller," one muttered.

"Lay the corpse out in that there shed at the back, boys, will you?" the bartender begged. "Gosh, I hope that *hombre* don't come in here no more. He's plumb bad, he is."

Mickey went away to his bed beside the corral where his horses looked at him through the pole fence. He had drunk a good deal but he was cold sober. He had won some money at poker and he had seen a man killed in what looked like a fair fight—but was not. He lay thinking about that fellow Dubois and his "confusion to the enemy". Mickey was handy with a gun. But that curly haired devil was chain lightning. That horse wrangler had made a fatal mistake, Mickey reflected. And Dubois had taken full advantage of that error. He had forced the issue because it suited him.

"Killer, I reckon," Mickey concluded. "Cool hand. Got away with lots of that, I expect. All same suicide to tangle with a feller like that. Cold blooded. When you're as good as he is you don't have to

kill nobody. What's the use of provokin' a man an' then killin' him just because you know you can?"

II

MICKEY rose at dawn, organized himself for travel. Few Trees, like many Texas hamlets, lay far beyond the immediate administration of organized law. There would be no inquest on that dead horse wrangler, no coroner and county officials making inquiry of eye witnesses. Few Trees would bury its dead and go about its business.

So Mickey paid his bill and departed. He had grub in his pack. He planned to make his morning coffee by a creek or spring. Two hours out of Few Trees he came on a spot that suited him and he unpacked. His bunch of loose horses grazed near by. He caught and saddled a fresh mount and tied him to a tree, one of a clump of pines that masked the rim of a bench that pitched sharp into a deep and winding cañon. A spring oozed out of a hollow and dribbled over the brink.

Something made him look up as the first tiny flame of his fire crackled around dry twigs. Dubois stood a few yards away, between Mickey and his tied horse, smiling.

"Hello there," Mickey greeted. If he felt a trifle uncomfortable he did not change countenance.

"I remembered your sayin' last night you were headed down to the Pecos," Dubois said pleasantly. "So'm I. I meant to suggest that two was company, last night. But that little fuss—" He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, I pulled out before I had to bump off any more damn' fools."

"Had breakfast?" Mickey inquired.

"Nope—just woke up. Got tired amblin' across these hills in the dark, so I camped when I struck this patch of pines. Outfit's staked in there."

They breakfasted together. Dubois turned his packhorse into Mickey's bunch and rode with him. They bore east out of the Guadalupes. Dubois had been all over the Southwest, north into Colorado. He talked engagingly. He had the personality to impress a youngster like Mickey. Mickey forgot his overnight estimate. Dubois was good company over a lonely land. It did not occur to Mickey that Dubois was deliberately laying himself out to be agreeable, to create an impression, for a definite purpose.

They came out on the lower spur of that range. Evening found them encamped in a place very similar to where they had cooked breakfast. That is, a spring trickling out of a side hill on a narrow bench that pitched into a shallow gorge. There was good grass and a stretch of plateau where they could eye their loose stock. Away southward they could see the low mountain chain that paralleled the Rio Grande. Prairies stretched away to the east, and northeast to the Staked Plains. Two days ride to the Block C. Tomorrow night they could tarry at a hospitable ranch on a western fork of the Toyah. Here, at sundown, they sat on the edge of the bench and stared southward into the land of *mañana*.

"She's a good country over there in Chihuahua," Dubois said abruptly. "*Serapes* an' señoritas and *tequila*. Plenty pickings for a couple of live riders—like you an' me."

"Yeah?" Mickey made his tone noncommittal.

"Thirty dollars a month," Dubois continued, "to eat dust behind bawlin' longhorn cattle. A fellow might as well be a *peon* as work for cow outfit's wages."

"It ain't no snap," Mickey agreed. He had not told Dubois he was old Ben Clarke's nephew. He had not told him anything. He did not quite know why.

Dubois glanced at him appraisingly.

"Suppose you and me was to turn south and slide across the Rio Grande with this bunch of ponies?" he proposed lightly. "They're first class stock. I know where we could get about twelve hundred dollars cash for this bunch. No questions asked. Two hundred miles south of El Paso. Safe as a church, eh?" Mickey felt as if something slimy had crawled over him. To Dubois he was

just a kid working for a cow outfit. Easy money always looked good to the common cowhand. Now and then one took a short cut. Mickey knew. He had seen kids go wrong.

A gunman, a potential killer, with that strange, savage itch for fresh notches on his gun was one thing. Mickey could have overlooked that. There were gunmen on the Block C payroll, dangerous men if their toes were tramped on ever so slightly. But this fellow was crooked, that most despicable of all crooks, a horsethief. Mickey concealed his real feelings. A measure of prudence advised evasion of the issue.

"Too chancy," he replied, as indifferently as he could.

"Scared?" Dubois inquired. "Hell, I know the ropes. We can swim the river in the night. There's a moon."

"I don't know as I got the nerve," Mickey said. "No. Not me. I know better ways of makin' money than stealin' horses."

"So do I, kid," Dubois suddenly changed his tune. "I was just tryin' you out. I hate a thief, m'self. S'pose we better hobble a few more of these nags to keep 'em from strayin' too far?"

"I don't think so," Mickey said. "They ain't eager to wander off good grass and water."

THEY bedded down within six feet of each other. Mickey slept lightly. Perhaps Dubois was only joking. But Mickey did not feel that Dubois meant that suggestion as a joke. Nor that he was feeling for honesty of intention. What was a Block C rider's honesty to a casual wayfarer? There was a distrust in Mickey's mind, profound, disquieting, and distrust bred caution, a wariness that carried over into the dawn. He dozed lightly, wakened bright eyed at the slightest sound. Daybreak was a relief.

And perhaps that overnight suspicion sharpened his eyes and ears as they unhobbled loose horses, loaded pack animals, saddled their mounts.

Dubois stood rolling a cigaret. Mickey took a few steps to the edge of the ravine. It ran north and south. They had to cross it. He was spying a possible descent from the rim. And although his gaze sought its objective that queer distrust made him aware that he did not like to turn his back on Dubois. And instinctively he turned his head.

Dubois still held his cigaret material—but in his left hand. He was leaning forward, tense, his lips parted, just as Mickey recalled his pose and expression when he drew on the horse wrangler in Few Trees. His right arm was crooking at the elbow.

Mickey saw this, sidelong. If Dubois had a lightning gun hand, Mickey Clarke had a lightning brain. He knew that if he reached for his own gun he was a dead man before he got it half drawn. And he was a dead man if he stood there. He divined that without reasoning. And Mickey earnestly desired to live and flourish, rather than be shot in the back so that a thief could steal forty horses single handedly.

So he cast himself nimbly over the brink of the ravine. And as he went over the rim Dubois drew. Mickey saw his hand flash up.

Thus by the fraction of a second he escaped assassination. Ten feet down a clump of brush broke his fall. Mickey's hasty survey of the slope had enabled him to reckon on that. A thicker patch stood beyond. He lurched, heaved toward that, half scrambling, half falling. And as he rolled Dubois appeared on the rim and fired at him.

The bullet threw dust in Mickey's face, blinded him momentarily. He felt himself falling, over and over. A second bump knocked the breath out of him. He went bounding off the steep face of the hillside like a sack of meal, like a dead man, which he should have been because Dubois fired twice more and missed each time. When Mickey brought up, dazed and semi-conscious, against a clump of scrubby pines far below he was as if dead. He lay still because he could not move.

Yet he was sufficiently alive to see Dubois peering from the top. So he lay still, simulating death. A fellow like that, Mickey reflected in the dizzy whirl of his thoughts, would not figure he missed three shots in a row. If only he did not take another carefully aimed shot to make sure. Thus Mickey.

And evidently Dubois considered the job well done. He stared a long time, then drew back. And Mickey, when Dubois disappeared, strove to crawl into the cover of those pines, felt himself grow dizzy and pass out of the picture like a diver plunging head first into gray green depths.

He came to himself among the pines, sore and stiff, with dried blood on his face and his clothes torn. He had lost his gun in that tumbling descent, he found. He sat up, looked about, stared up at the sun, reckoned time. At least an hour must have elapsed.

Before he went searching on that open hillside for his gun, Mickey decided, he had better make sure Dubois was not sitting there waiting to pot him. He dismissed that conjecture. A man like Dubois would not waste time. He would either scramble down at once and finish the job, or consider it finished and ride on—with his loot.

Which is what Mr. Dubois had done. Mickey covered the camp ground, examined hoof prints, ran his saddle to earth where Dubois had cast it aside in a thicket. Mickey could follow the logic of that. An extra saddle was a little too conspicuous, not worth the risk.

The forty Block C horses left a plain trail to the south, down toward the Rio Grande, with shod hoofs trailing in the rear. Dubois, plainly enough, was headed for Mexico with twelve hundred dollars worth of plunder. Mounted, Mickey might head him off. But he was not mounted and he doubted whether he would be soon, since so far as he knew he was thirty or forty miles from any habitation. Before he could cover that distance afoot Dubois would be over the river into the state of Chihuahua, where—as he had said—it was as safe as a church for any outlaw who knew the ropes.

BRUISED and sick and humiliated, Mickey sat beside the spring and considered, while he bathed his face. Resolutely, at last, he shouldered the heavy stock saddle and struck south toward a place he knew on a creek running out from the Davis country. Not till dusk had fallen and a yellow window shone through the dark to guide him did Mickey drag his weary legs over the threshold of that ranch-house.

"I'm one of Ben Clarke's riders," he told them. "I've had my outfit stole. Lend me a mount and tell me where the nearest Ranger's camp lays."

They did both. Sent a man with him across the hills. But neither Mickey nor the Texas Rangers laid eyes on that bunch of horses again. They trailed them from the spot where Dubois shot at Mickey to a crossing of the Rio. Beyond that they could not go. Porfirio Diaz's *rurales* would as soon head off Texas Rangers trespassing in Mexico as a horsethief with his plunder.

So Mickey rode home on a borrowed horse, sadder and wiser, filled with shame and burning anger. His body was as sore as his heart, from tumbling down that cañon wall. Old Ben himself happened to be at the home ranch organizing a trail herd for delivery in Wyoming.

"Never mind, Mickey," he said kindly. "Them things happen. You done your best."

But his best had not been good enough. Mickey smarted under that. He ached to see that dark, handsome face over the sights of a gun. Mickey despised thieves and murderers as the clean man instinctively despises dirt and disorder. Sometime or other he would come across George Dubois. When he did—wherever he did—

Recalling the man's deadly speed with a gun, Mickey realized that if he did he would only be offering himself up as another tribute to a marksman's skill.

Mickey was good with a belt gun. He

had played with six-shooters all his young life. But he had never taken it seriously. He was not fast enough to cope with Dubois. He remembered too vividly with what ease and precision Dubois had beaten that horse wrangler in Few Trees to the first shot.

So Mickey set about remedying that lack. For six months he spent all his wages on ammunition, all his spare hours practising a draw. He kept that to himself, what he was doing and why. He worked out a techinque of his own. How perfect it became he only learned by accident. Tarrying overnight in Grandfalls with the range boss of the Block C, a drunken rider from the lower Pecos drew on Mickey for some fancied insult. And Mickey shot the gun out of his hand at a distance of ten feet, scarcely bruising the man's fingers. The fellow looked at Mickey, at his hand, numbed from the shock, at his six-shooter on the floor, and he said in sobered tones—

"You could 'a' put my light out as easy as doin' that, kid."

"You're foolish with liquor," Mickey said quietly. "I'm no killer. I got nothing against you."

"You could sure be sudden death if you wanted," the rider said with reluctant admiration. "I don't know who you are but I take off my hat to anybody that'll take a chance like that instead of playin' safe. I'd 'a' got you if you'd missed."

"I'm not likely to miss," Mickey observed. "Are you satisfied?"

"I am. An' plumb obliged to you," the cowpuncher said politely. "You're a gentleman an' a scholar, an' I will think twice before I pull my gun on a stranger again."

Mickey told no one of his purpose. But when he returned to the Block C he drew his wages and set out to find his man.

IN TWO years he ranged from Laredo to Flagstaff, Arizona, north to Trinidad, Colorado, across the flat face of Kansas and Oklahoma and back to the Pecos again. He listened and looked, asked a question here, followed a blind trail there. Always he practised that quick whip of a .45, as an angler practises his cast. Men liked Mickey for himself. Other men who did not like him accorded him the compliment of leaving him alone once they saw him handle a gun. Only he did not make a show of that.

But he never came upon Dubois. From the time that curly haired killer stole those forty Block C's and left Mickey bleeding in the cañon, he vanished from the Southwest. Mickey uncovered some past history. People in New Mexico knew him. They did not know him as Dubois, but they knew him by his description. He was too striking a figure not to be remembered with clarity. And he was bad; bad as a youth, bad as a man. He came through the Guadalupes on the dodge. His clash with the horse wrangler in Few Trees was characteristic. He made trouble and emerged from it unscathed. He did not work. He always had money. He was smooth in poker games. Wherever he went he became a storm center, and usually left as a matter of precaution. But for Mickey his trail ended in the Guadalupes, where it had first crossed his own.

"Probably threw in with some Mex outlaws in Chihuahua or Sonora," a man in Tombstone told Mickey. "I figured that's how he'd wind up. I knew his folks. He growed up in Santa Fé. He's another Billy the Kid. A vigilance committee'll tend to him if he ever shows up in this territory again."

Two years dulled the edge of Mickey's rancor. He was growing up. The Clarke blood and brains made him successful at whatever he undertook, wherever he went. Intelligence, tenacity and loyalty are just as prime virtues on the frontier as elsewhere—perhaps more so. When Mickey came back to the Block C ranch on the Toyah, he was two inches thicker through the chest, a little deeper voiced, a living disproof to the saying that a rolling stone gathers no moss. He had three thousand dollars in a money belt to show for his wanderings. He had been a

great many places, done a great many things, met a variety of people. Women liked him. Men liked him. Those who did not left him alone, as a rule. Mickey inspired that sort of feeling.

"In two years you'll be twenty-one," his Uncle Ben told him. "You've been wilder'n a hawk since you was fifteen. Settle down, kid. Forget this trailin' a cheap outlaw that did you a injury once. Stay with the Block C. You can be a range boss time you come of age, if you want."

Mickey laughed and went to work for his uncle again.

And that should have been the end of the chain of events that began in Few Trees. But it was not. No. Merely an interlude. Call it what you like—fate, destiny, the hand of God, blind chance.

Mickey was not like the Bourbons, who learned nothing and forgot nothing. He learned a great deal. But he did not forget Dubois. And whatever gods there be, were weaving their pattern—or else it just happened. *Quien sabe?*

III

WHEN the State of Texas began to spill its surplus herds north and west in much the same volume that the Rio Grande spews its flood into the Gulf of Mexico, many little sinks of iniquity sprang up and flourished along the pathways traversed by the longhorns in their march to virgin grass and water. In quiet little towns, in metropolitan cities anywhere west of the Mississippi, anywhere north of the Rio Grande, you may still find reputable middle aged citizens who will remember with a shrug or a frown—or perhaps a strange lighting of their eyes—such places as Mullen's Bog on the Canadian, Sleeping Woman on the Arkansas, Clarke's Ford on the Platte. They sprang up at a focal point on the cattle trail. A general store with a stock freighted a hundred, three hundred, six hundred miles. A combined saloon and dance hall. Painted women and smooth handed gamblers. Cheap whisky and music of sorts. No shrinking violets troubled those parts. It was a hard country and soft people did not tarry. The cowpunchers were not naturally soft. They took their pleasures as they took their work, with a recklessness of what lay ahead if they could but cope with the moment.

They made such places possible because they had wages to spend. Trail herd owners had supplies to buy. Men grow weary hanging on the flanks of two thousand longhorned cattle across fifteen hundred miles of unpeopled waste, of seeing the sun rise out of grassy plains on the east and set in a sea of grass on the west, day after day. The heady uplift of red liquor, cards on a green cloth table, bright lights, a woman's smile—even a painted smile about which the trail rider in his heart had no illusions—meant something.

Various twenty minute eggs capitalized that something in the places named, and many others whose names have passed out of memory.

Clarke's Ford on the Platte was probably the most outstanding little sink between Texas and Montana. Ben Clarke drove one of the first trail herds north over a route that later became famous. He located the only hardpan crossing for many miles along the treacherous, sandy Platte. It became the established trail for herds bound to Montana, to the Northwest in general. Herds converged upon that crossing, radiated like the spokes of a wheel beyond it. The place that sprang into being on the north bank, where the herds lay when they came dripping out of the river, took old Ben's name for itself. Clarke's Ford. Old Ben used to frown when it was mentioned. He was a decent man, and Clarke's Ford acquired a hard reputation.

Still, coming into this frontier camp at night was impressive—by contrast with the dark and the silence, the great emptiness that ran for a hundred miles on every hand. Especially so when a man had gazed for seven weeks on bleached grass and gray sagebrush, guiding a herd

that seemed to creep day by day over the face of the earth and get nowhere. The river ran by the door of Clarke's Ford. Night cloaked the shoddy frame buildings, made them mysterious and alluring to men who slept all season in tents or under the winking stars. There is a peculiar magic in laughter and lights and music.

So Clarke's Ford had various uses, served various purposes. It acquired fame. In time it acquired a sizable graveyard, too. Trail herds hauled across the Platte by Clarke's Ford. Riders frolicked an hour or a day in its lurid precincts for several seasons before any law but that laid down by Colonel Colt adjudicated disputes in that region.

THREE years after Mickey Clarke went back to the Block C from his pilgrimage, he came galloping into Clarke's Ford one hushed, moonless July night. North bound from Texas with one of his uncle's trail herds, fresh off first guard at eleven o'clock, Mickey held his horse a minute before a place he had never seen except as he gazed from the lead of the herd at daybreak that morning.

The Odeon. Mickey stared at the painted sign over the door, illuminated by a lantern. He sat in his saddle, a true American Cossack, straight, slender, imperious, staring at the door, at uncurtained windows where light glowed, listening to the hum and lift of voices, soft voices drawling, and raucous voices that jarred his Southern ear, to the lilt of a fiddle and the banging chords of a piano that had known no tuner since it came into Clarke's Ford on a freight wagon behind seven yoke of bulls.

"Well, we're here," Mickey said softly. "We have a job to do."

He had been saying that to himself at intervals all through the two hours of first guard, saying it softly, sadly, but with cold determination. In the Block C chuck tent the trail boss snored. Every man but those who relieved Mickey and his partner on guard lay quiet in his blankets. That was an order. The Block C had lain in sight of Clarke's Ford all that day. Twelve hours. A lot can happen in so brief a span. At dawn the Block C would break camp and point north, short one man, another riding with his arm in a sling. Clarke's Ford would remain, plying its trade, watching for the next herd to crawl up out of the southern horizon.

The wagon boss had made that order a profane and earnest one. None, not even his guard partner, knew that Mickey alone disregarded it. If one had guessed his mood and mind the entire outfit, fourteen picked riders, would have kept him in camp or walked with him to a man into the Odeon, heads up, eyes roving, challenging.

Mickey did not enter like an avenging threat. He sauntered in casually, a slim youth, erect as a spear, as keen. A thousand like him rode up the cow trail every season. Not all finished the journey. Not all rode back.

In that garish palace of joy the center floor lay clear for dancing. On a raised platform at one end the two man orchestra thumped and scraped. On the east side the gambling layouts ranged against the wall—faro, roulette, three card monte, dice, poker tables. The north end was filled with a long bar. None of your polished mahogany with plate mirrors behind to reflect bottles and glassware. No brass rail to be clawed by spurred heels. A man kept his feet on the floor and drank his whisky off unvarnished pine.

And along the eastern side from the door where Mickey entered to a door back stage, so to speak, stood a number of small tables where the weary footed could sit at ease and buy percentage drinks for the house girls.

Mickey came in as a couple of entertainers in abbreviated tulle skirts, two plump, agile, strident voiced creatures, did a song and dance turn. There were forty or fifty men in the Odeon. Probably a dozen were grouped at the bar, drinking.

Mickey took it all in, bright eyed,

alert. He leaned his elbow on the end of the bar and gazed at the drinkers, heads all in a row. The bartender at that end was setting up bottles and glasses. He could see hands busy. The song ended. The music ceased. Over the clamor of conversation a voice, deep toned, rich, full, said something that made Mickey quiver and then grow taut.

"Well—here's confusion to the enemy."

He could not distinguish which one spoke, but it came out of that drinking group. Mickey thought hard, took hold of himself. The totally unexpected had jarred him. He was back in Few Trees for a moment. He saw and felt himself rolling down that cañon in the foot of the Guadalupes. He burned again with the same humiliation, felt the same desire for reprisal stir him—over and above the shock of surprise. For he had not come into the Odeon with any thought of George Dubois. No, quite another matter, a deeper emotional disturbance had brought him there. Yet he hungered to make sure, even though he knew his real business there must take priority of Dubois. And so he coolly walked down past the row of drinking men, looking them over as he went. The fifth man from the end was Dubois, better dressed, a little fuller in the face. Dubois nevertheless. Mickey went on to the faro layout, watched a minute, turned and walked back. He did not dwell on the man. He did not need to.

And back at the bar end Mickey sidled along by the small tables till he found a vacant one. He sat with his back to the wall. Twenty-five feet from him a door opened into dressing rooms behind the crude stage. Close by it another gave outdoors.

MICKEY picked this seat with strategic intent—all unaware that it was to serve a wholly unexpected end. He had come there with a definite purpose which did not require haste. He had plenty of time. An hour before dawn would do. But recognition of Dubois— The man's mere presence complicated things for Mickey. He had to think.

"I might get two birds with one stone," he said to himself sardonically. "I don't think. First I got to locate this other *hombre*. Dubois has kept for five years. He'll keep awhile yet. Unless he is one of this crowd, and horns in. In that case—"

Mickey sat considering what "in that case" might lead to.

A bright eyed girl, peroxided, rouged, powdered, stared at Mickey over the shoulder of the man she drank with. Her eyes twinkled. She smiled and kept smiling into Mickey's unmoved countenance. She was no older than he. Her breast was round under the tight orange satin of a bodice. She flung wordless invitations at him. But she did not entice Mickey Clarke.

In a minute or two she rose, walked toward the rear, came back, halted by Mickey at his table.

"Hello, kid," she said.

"I'm full growed," Mickey replied.

"I expect you are," she agreed. "Come on and dance with me."

"I ain't dancin' tonight," Mickey said. "Thanks just the same."

"You sick?" she bantered.

He shook his head.

"Broke?" she queried further.

"Neither sick nor broke," Mickey drawled. "Just sittin' thinkin'."

"Don't do it," she advised cheerfully. "Bad for what ails you, kid. Better to drown your sorrows in drink."

"Thinkin' ain't sorrowful," Mickey told her. "Not for me. Not tonight. Maybe I'll celebrate before mornin'."

"Well, come and take a whirl with me whenever you feel inclined," the orange satin, peroxided lady invited cordially. "You look all right to me, kid, and that's no lie. Just shove right in wherever I happen to be and I'm with you."

"Thank you," Mickey answered courteously. "I'll remember that."

He would have had her sit down, bought her a drink, and casually asked questions she could probably answer to

his satisfaction. But he marked the man she had been with casting sour glances. He did not want to be conspicuous. He had all night. Other girls, or some stray cowpuncher or bull whacker would tell him what he desired to know, later on. The prospect of a cheap and easy conquest of a dance hall girl plowed no deep furrows in Mickey's brain. He sank back into his own reflections, eyes on Dubois and his group of satellites. He could see that Dubois was buying drinks. He could hear his voice lifted in the old strident, challenging toast. Confusion to the enemy! He had half forgotten that—had never expected to hear it again.

Mickey's gaze took in everything. That, considering his mission, was sound wisdom, even if it had not been his habit. Presently he saw a girl slip out of the stage door, move slowly along the wall to within six feet of him.

In contrast to the baker's dozen of dance hall women in glaring reds, bright yellows, cerises and greens that smote the eye, this girl was all in black—a black lace dress without a touch of color. By contrast her throat and face were as fair as a lily. Her hair was bronze with glints of gold where the lamplight struck. She wore no rouge. Her eyes, it seemed to Mickey, were sad. But she could smile—for she did when a slow shift of her head brought her gaze about to meet his arrested attention.

And it was not the smile of invitation Mickey had found bestowed upon him many times in his short career. That made him wonder too. Dance hall girls smiled with a purpose. The ready smile was part of their technique of approach. This girl did not smile like that.

The faint lighting of her eyes, the wistful flicker about her lips came and went like shadows.

Mickey made a gesture, born of impulse, yet not wholly without design. He beckoned the girl to a vacant chair at his table. She seemed to hesitate and he made the gesture more peremptory. She sank into the chair beside him. Her glance for an instant went out over dancing couples to the group drinking at the bar, and came back to Mickey. Certainly there was no merriment on her face or in her gray eyes, nor any expectancy; only that curious hint of sadness, which might have been translated as fear.

"Will you have a drink?" Mickey politely uttered the usual formula.

"I don't mind," she assented indifferently.

A waiter plying his trade with an eye sharp to percentage hovered near. The girl ordered whisky. So did Mickey.

Yet neither drank. They touched lips to glasses, set them down, to stare at each other. Some chord of remembrance stirred in Mickey Clarke's brain, struggled to find expression. For a moment he forgot why he was there, gave himself up to reconstructing a picture that tantalized him by blurred outlines, misty perspective. And the girl looked at him with a growing wonder in her eyes.

IV

"I'VE SEEN you before," Mickey said at last. "Not in a dance hall, either."

"Not likely," she shook her head slowly. "I come a long, long way from here."

"I know," Mickey caught the loose threads. "I remember, now. Kansas City. In the Emporium Ready To Wear. You sold my sister a green silk dress. I was with her. Visitin' there. Gosh!"

She looked at him. A shiny film gathered in her gray eyes. She put her chin in cupped palms.

"A year ago last winter," Mickey murmured. "I thought about you a lot after I went back to the Pecos. Funny. When I didn't even speak to you. How you get pitchforked into a joint like this?"

"What does it matter?" she answered, pain, weariness, regret in her voice. "That's a long time ago, and far away. What's it to you?"

"Nothin', I guess," Mickey admitted. "Only you remind me of Jess. We're twins. I was thinkin' of her—here."

"It's all right," the girl muttered, "so long as it's another man's sister."

"I didn't say that. I don't think it," Mickey protested. "Drink your drink."

When he lifted his glass she made a motion with hers. Mickey came back to himself, out of his absorbing interest in this girl, to a recollection of why he was there. And though his head turned, he saw out of one corner of his eye that she emptied hers down a table leg to the floor. Nor did Mickey drink, though his glass was empty when he put it down. He had seen too many men lose sureness of hand and eye from dance hall whisky.

"Other men's sisters," the girl repeated gently. "You all make dance hall girls what they are and then, except when you want to play with them, you despise them."

"No, I don't," Mickey said. "I feel sorry for 'em. Anyway, dance hall girls aren't my business, I guess."

"What is your business here?" she asked directly.

"Passin' the time mostly," he answered. "I been standin' another feller's shift on day herd. I just come off first guard. First time I've been in Clarke's Ford for more'n ten minutes since we crossed our herd at sunrise this mornin'."

"Bound somewhere north?"

"Teton River in Montana," Mickey told her.

"I wish I was going," she murmured. "I wish I was there right now. I know some people in Fort Benton."

"So?" Mickey commented.

He thought about that awhile. Somehow this girl seemed to belong in a different category from the flaunting women whose gaudy costumes made bright spots of color about the Odeon. But he had not called her to him altogether for idle talk, or to grow sentimental.

He beckoned the bartender. That was how a man paid for a woman's company at those little tables. It did not matter that neither wanted to drink whisky. When the glasses came Mickey stared at the reddish liquor.

"There was a fuss in here this afternoon, I hear," said he. "Cowpuncher tangled with a gambler. Cowpuncher went to the boneyard. Hear about it?"

"I saw it," she whispered. "I'll never forget it. Ugh!"

She shivered.

"It was a feller name of Duvenny shot this kid," Mickey went on with assumed indifference. "So I was told. They say he's a bad actor. Is he here? Which is him?"

"I can't point," the girl muttered. "I don't dare. He watches me. The big man in the middle of that line at the bar, in a black suit and straight brimmed Stetson. Keep away from him. He's a devil."

"Do you mean," Mickey asked slowly, "that the feller who shot that boy this afternoon is the same *hombre* that stands up there sayin' 'Confusion to the enemy' every time he takes a drink?"

She nodded.

MICKEY looked past weaving dancers at that burly figure flanked by sycophants. His eyes narrowed. Dubois—Duvenny. One and the same. And still killing. Well, that was good.

"What does he do here—this Duvenny? Anything besides gamble? Has he a gang of friends?" Mickey inquired casually.

"He owns this place," she said. "He run's Clarke's Ford to suit himself, and everybody in it."

"Includin' you?"

"Including me." Her eyes fell and the tone was dull—except for a touch of resentment.

"Spill your drink on the floor and let's dance," Mickey said to the girl.

A touch of color tinted her creamy, unpainted cheeks.

"All these dames sidestep their liquor mostly, with drunken cowpunchers," he said. "I'm not drinkin' either. I'm only buyin' because it's the custom of the country. Let's dance."

"I can't," she said.

"Why?" Mickey demanded.

She shook her head, smiling again, a wistful shadow of a smile flitting across what Mickey thought was the sweetest face he had ever seen. And in the Odeon in Clarke's Ford—the toughest hurdy-gurdy joint between the Panhandle and the forty-ninth parallel. Mickey could not fathom it. She was not the type. But he knew mingled fear and regret when those emotions reflected in a woman's eyes.

"You poor kid," he muttered. "What the blazes you doin' here anyway? You don't belong in a place like this, a-tall."

She did not answer. She looked away. One hand closed into a tight, white knuckled fist.

"You're here today and gone tomorrow," she whispered. "It's nothing to you."

"Come on, dance," Mickey wheedled.

For the first time in his career Mickey found himself urged on by mixed motives. The casual emergence of this girl from the crowd, her coming to a halt near where he sat had fitted into a plan, almost. And she had told him all he wanted to know, what he had come there to find out—even though the knowledge was rather more than he bargained for.

There was a link between her and Dubois—Duvenny. Well, call him Duvenny. The name did not matter. The man did. Mickey had a two fold score against him now. And while craft and reason apprised him that dancing with her would enable him to stage something that would draw Duvenny, he found himself in the same breath wanting to dance with her because she was herself. He did not consider too closely the root of that impulse.

"Come on," he urged.

She shook her head again. Mickey rose. He towered over her straight and tall, flat, wide shoulders squared, an impish twist to his mouth.

"Listen, gray eyes," said he, so low that no one else could hear, for he was conscious that the girl in orange satin who had first spoken to him, looked fixedly, rather meaningly, at them over her partner's shoulder. "I'm not on a spree. I'm not lookin' particularly for female excitement. But I would like to dance with you just once."

"Will you promise," she looked up at him, "that if I dance once you will walk right out of this place, get on your horse, and ride away?"

"I will."

Mickey made that promise with a reservation. He would ride away—but he would ride right back. He had three hours till dawn. Dubois would keep awhile. He was still drinking. Mickey heard his voice again lifted above that drone, lifted in that significant toast—

"Confusion to the enemy!"

At once a defiance and the triumphant howl of the wolf over his kill. Mickey responded to that defiance as if it were a challenge to himself. But he could wait his time.

The girl rose. They moved out on the floor.

Before they had circled to that side of the hall where the gambling games were bunched something had happened to Mickey Clarke. He did not quite know how it came about. A man seldom does know why a given woman stirs something in him that no other ever does or ever can.

Folly, madness, an impulse of the flesh, or mysterious recognition of some dim spiritual affinity, it happens to men and women here and there, in high life or low, to the good and the bad alike. There is no rhyme or reason in it. It happened to Mickey. It happened to the girl. It communicated itself swiftly, subtly through the clasp of their hands. He could feel her heart quicken against his own.

"I don't want to dance any more," he whispered. "I want to talk to you. Not in this dance hall. Come outside."

She seemed to consider, her mop of bronze yellow curls at his shoulder.

"You don't know George Duvenny," she murmured. "It's too dangerous."

"For you?" he asked.

"Oh, no. He might curse me. But he'd kill you, if he got started."

Mickey chuckled harshly.

"Nobody has killed me yet, Goldenhair. I'm not so easy as that kid he shot this afternoon. I'll take a chance with Mister Duvenny any time. But I would like to talk to you first."

"Look." Her voice grew suddenly eager. "Go back to our table and order a drink. I'll have that with you and then I'll leave you. You walk out the main door. Go along the outside wall toward that side door near the stage. I'll meet you there."

Mickey could feel her shiver a little in his arms. He looked once long and earnestly into her eyes. Eyes gray like the sea under a cloudy sky. A spot of pink glowed on each cheek under Mickey's questioning stare.

THEN he looked up and about. They came abreast of where Dubois faced over the assembly, his elbows propping him against the bar, surveying his establishment with something like satisfaction. Mickey felt pretty sure Dubois could not possibly recall him in that throng. Five years is a long time. Mickey had grown, matured, changed. Dubois had not changed at all. A dark, handsome, cruel mouthed man. Over the girl's shoulder Mickey met his eye, stared back indifferently. Dubois' brows knitted a trifle, and his eyes followed them. But he did not move. Mickey Clarke was just another trail hand to him.

They came at length back to their table and sat down, the waiter hastening to bring the usual drinks.

"I'm going to take this," the girl said under her breath. "Maybe I'll need it."

Mickey slid his drink down on the floor.

"I'm going now," she said. "In about five minutes I'll be outside."

Mickey sat alone. The girl in flaming orange finished a dance with her partner and walked straight to Mickey's table.

"Kid, you got a way with you," she muttered. "But for the Lord's sake lay off that white faced thing in the black dress—unless you want to smell powder. She ought to know better. A darned nice kid got killed over her this afternoon. That's Duvenny's girl."

"Yeah," Mickey drawled. "That's nothin' to me. I'm pullin' out pretty quick anyhow. This Duvenny's bad, eh?"

"Bad?" the girl echoed. "If there's anything worse on two legs in this business I don't know it, an' I know 'em all from Omaha to Denver. Fool with anybody but walk away around *her*. All she spells is sure trouble to any nice kid like you."

"I'm maybe not so nice," Mickey said grimly.

"What's the matter that Duvenny goes to war over her? Why don't he keep her outa this public place if he's jealous?"

"You don't *sabe* George Duvenny." The orange clad one smoothed out her skirt and smiled invitingly at Mickey. "He's got to show her off. That's the kind he is. She ain't like the rest of us. She's no dance hall worker. So she's got to parade herself so that everybody can see what a prize package little Georgie has to hisself—damn his soul! I guess he put something over on her to get her out here. I know she hates him like poison. An' he knows it too. For six months she's been tryin' to get away from him, but she can't cut the mustard. Duvenny's got her buffaloed. Whenever a man looks like he might be interested in her Duvenny goes after him. Gets him, too. Don't be foolish, kid. You're too young an' good lookin' to die of lead poisonin'."

"Oh," Mickey commented. "Well, I'm due to travel, so it's all one to me. Thanks just the same."

"Come on, take a whirl around the floor with me," the girl said.

Mickey shook his head.

"I'm due to go right now," he told her. "But maybe I'll be back for a whirl later on."

He grinned at his own interpretation of a "whirl later on". But he grew soberly thoughtful as he moved along the outer wall in the darkness under the windows of the Odeon. He looked first

to his horse, patient beside a hitching rack. The night had grown black. Clouds overcast the stars.

THE GIRL'S face was a pale blur where she stood. Mickey put his hands on her shoulders. The warm soft flesh gave him a curious thrill, gave him a queer swift vision of himself and her in totally different surroundings. A puzzled surprise troubled his mind. He had always scouted the notion of falling for a woman in that headlong fashion. He had seen men afflicted with that sort of madness, do mad things. What he meant to do, what had taken form in his imagination as a wholly desirable undertaking, to be executed without doubt or hesitation, did not seem mad. It appeared to him the most natural thing in the world.

"I don't even know your name," he murmured.

"Glen," she whispered. "Glen Marsh."

"Are there any strings on you?" he asked abruptly.

"None that I wouldn't break—if I could," she answered quickly.

"I am going to Montana," Mickey found himself saying. He pinched the feeling out of his voice, made it cool, matter of fact. "I went up the trail last summer through Dakota, an' located myself a ranch on the Teton River. I'm going back to it. I have two good horses, some money and I can get grub. Will you come with me?"

For a few seconds the girl stood silent.

"Why?" she asked.

"You don't belong here, for one thing," he said. "And besides, I like you."

And again she stood silent for a time, only now her head drooped against Mickey's breast, where his heart beat double quick against his ribs.

"You don't know what you might be letting yourself in for," she whispered at last. "Oh, I wish I could."

"You can," Mickey encouraged. "I'll take you sight unseen out of this town inside of twenty minutes, if you'll take a chance with me."

"You don't know anything about me," she murmured.

"Nor you about me," he replied. "So we have an even break on that. You say you know some people in Fort Benton. I'm going through Fort Benton. My place is only a few miles beyond. I'll make you a promise. I'll shoot square. When we hit the fort, if you don't want to go through with it, I'll kiss you goodby and wish you luck. But I want to take you with me, if—if you want to go."

"If I want to go?" She looked up into his face. "Oh, I do. I do. If I don't get away soon I'll die or commit murder."

"Come on then," Mickey pleaded. "Right now."

"As I am?" she asked breathlessly.

"Yes. Sure."

He could feel her tremble in his arms.

"We'll be followed," she said. "Oh, I shouldn't. You don't know."

"Maybe I know more than you think," he said. "Anybody that follows will have to go fast and far. And they'll maybe get more than they expect if they come up with us. Don't let that bother you, Goldenhair. Come along with me. We can beat this game. I know it."

She slipped her hand into his and Mickey led her in the dark to his horse. He untied the beast, walked, reins in hand, beyond the last flicker of light from the windows, out past the last building, away to where trampled sagebrush surrounded Clarke's Ford. He tied the horse to a root, drew Glen a few yards aside.

"Squat down here," he said. "I have to go back for just a minute. I forgot something. Huddle down in the brush. Nobody can see you, unless they step on you. I won't be long."

Glen put out a hand and caught him.

"Mickey," she said, "what are you going back for? I'm afraid."

He took her hand, pressed a kiss into the soft palm and doubled her fingers tight over it.

"Don't be afraid. Just sit tight till I call you," he laughed happily—and left her.

V

THE DOOR of the Odeon swung open under his hand. He stopped just within, by the end of the bar, until his eyes grew accustomed to the change from darkness to bright light. And then he saw Dubois emerge from that back door to the stage, looking like a thundercloud, casting dark glances about him.

His eye fell on Mickey. Mickey looked at him, through him, making his face for the moment a mask of indifference. But inwardly he was smiling, for Dubois turned toward him. And the stage was set altogether to Mickey's liking. He stood within six feet of the exit, a blank wall at his back. No one could get behind him. Mickey asked for nothing more.

Dubois eyed him as he moved along the tables. He *was* a handsome devil, Mickey thought, a powerful man physically, a magnificent animal who belied his graceful exterior.

"A fellow like that," Mickey found time to reflect, "you'd think he'd be good to a woman and easy with men." Instead he was like any predatory beast, without mercy or compassion.

TEN FEET away, Dubois, who had been coming slowly toward him, seemed about to turn, although his suspicious gaze was still on this slim youngster standing carelessly by the bar. Whatever went on in his mind, whatever his intention, Mickey stayed him with a beckoning gesture.

"Mr. George Duvenny, I believe," said Mickey softly. "Mr. George Duvenny who used to do his dirty work as George Dubois!"

With the last, Mickey's voice had snapped like a lash and Dubois started, the color receding from his dark cheeks.

"Who—who—"

"You've killed several men in your time," Mickey broke in. He did not lift his voice, but his tones were clear. Near them men halted, hushed their talk, so that a silence fell and spread. "You put a kid's light out this afternoon. Did you ever shoot it out with an even break, Dubois?"

The owner of the Odeon, the boss of Clarke's Ford, leaned toward Mickey. A curious grin began to twist his features. His eyes narrowed. The corners of his mouth drew up. His hands hung at his sides, elbows beginning to crook imperceptibly, like a cat tensing leg muscles for a spring.

And Mickey standing at ease, his head cocked a little on one side, bored into the dark eyes with his grayish brown ones, laughing a cold mirthless laugh that was barbed with contempt.

"Oho," Dubois said between his teeth. "You're a friend of his, eh?"

"Yes," Mickey spat at him. "Go for your gun—"

Mickey's right hand flashed up past his scabbard. Shell men truly declare in their sing-song chant that the quickness of the hand deceives the eye—the trained hand. Quick as Dubois moved, Mickey's move was faster by a breath and his gun roared before Dubois' hand came to a level.

Mickey lurched sidewise as he fired, toward the door. A second time he pulled trigger as Dubois' bullet smashed into the wall above him—a wild shot, as much the spasmodic twitch of an iron finger as a conscious act. For Dubois' knees were sagging under him, his head drooping. Mickey fired a third time as he pressed the outer door with his back, and the murderer, thief, gambler, fell forward on his face as Mickey backed into the night.

He had done what he rode into Clarke's Ford determined to do. But he had accomplished more. He had paid a just debt in the only coin current with such as George Dubois. But he had no mind to pay it over and over again to the henchmen of the man he had just killed. So he slipped quickly away in the darkness. The most fearless thug in the Odeon would hesitate to follow him outside. He had a double incentive to go now,

while he could go unmolested, unscathed.

"Ho, Glen!" he said, when his fingers closed on his horse's tie rope. "Come on. It's our move."

The girl rose out of the sagebrush. Mickey guided her foot to the stirrup, heaved her to the saddle, swung up behind her.

The hoofs of his horse padded on the baked earth. He rode at a walk until he was well clear of Clarke's Ford, until it was a dull cluster of lights by the pale band of the river. Then he spurred into a lope. The Block C lay off to the northwest.

"I heard some shooting," Glen said at last. "It scared me."

"You have nothin' to be scared of no more," Mickey murmured in her ear. "Not from any man. Not while I'm on deck, partner."

His right hand held the reins, guiding the horse. She took it between her own, gave it a gentle squeeze. Thereafter they rode in silence until they heard the night guard crooning to the herd. Beyond that the wagon and two tents loomed ghost white before them.

Mickey bade her get down a little aside from the camp, and left her to hold the horse out of sight and hearing.

"It's better they think I'm alone," he whispered. "I will get my outfit and some grub and we will go on. There is a reason. I'll tell you after."

So Glen Marsh waited again, standing in the grass with a bridle rein in her hand, and Mickey's coat over her shoulders to fend off the chill night air.

She could not see Mickey go into the chuck tent, wake the sleeping trail boss to conversation, nor see the man's surprised face as he listened, nodding agreement.

"You might lay up somewheres ahead an' join us—say around the Big Horn country," the man said as they stowed food into a pair of kyaks. "Nobody's goin' to follow you up. The United States ain't goin' to turn out troops on your trail for killin' a skunk like Duvenny. Fact there had ought to be a bounty on such as him. You sure had your nerve to take him right in his own place, Mickey."

"I had to," Mickey replied softly. "I couldn't 'a' lived with myself if I hadn't. Tommy was like my own brother. It was pure murder to kill him. I know. The boys told me. Tommy wouldn't 'a' harmed a fly. He couldn't. He was laughin', thinkin' it a joke, when Dubois shot him."

"Well," the trail boss said, "I tried to head you off from it. Old Ben would 'a' raised hell with me if a tinhorn gambler had killed you in a tough town named after him."

"Nobody could 'a' headed me off from that," Mickey grunted. "I play my own hand, Mudge. Tommy was goin' to marry my sister Jess when he went home this fall. Anyway, that's the end of that killer's rope. He won't be missed. Well, I'm organized. I'll be on the Teton when you bring the herd in this fall, Mudge. I think I'll go right through. I can get things started on my own location."

"Sure. So long."

"So long." Mickey shook hands with the man. "Go back to sleep, old-timer. I'm gone. It'll soon be day."

Mudge turned into his tent, rubbing sleepy eyes. Mickey had another horse, with the dead Tommy Prior's saddle on him for Glen, another animal packed with food and bedding. He led them away to where Glen waited in the enfolding blackness.

"Mount, little Goldenhair," he whispered. "We're hittin' a long trail."

Silently, she did bidding.

VI

THEY pointed north under a gloomy sky over an illimitable plain of sagebrush. For two hours thus they rode in darkness, in the silent night, silent themselves. A faint creak of leather, the clink of a bit chain, the tinkle of Mickey's spur rowels, the *clup-clup* of hoofs. Nothing more. Until dawn broke with Clarke's Ford twenty miles

below a horizon that paled and flamed, and at last grew golden bright under the round eye of the sun.

They found themselves on the crest of a low grassy ridge. Naked plains ran away east, west, north, a yellow and gray green infinity like the sea from the deck of a ship far offshore. A mile or two on the left Mickey descried a patch of willows. Willows might spell water. He rode for them and found a small creek sunk below the general level. Wood of a sort, and water. He unpacked by that patch of brush.

He looked at Glen when his stuff was laid out on the ground. She stood watching him, a beautiful fair haired, sad eyed girl in a black lace dress, absurd little black satin slippers on her feet. It made his heart quicken just to look at her with the sun glinting in that copper gold hair. Mickey had never seen anything quite like her. She seemed incredible, like a dream. But he knew she was very, very real. No wonder he had carried her face in his memory for over a year. He recalled that his sister had spoken of the girl's astonishing beauty as they walked out of the Emporium.

Mickey stood up, put his arm across her shoulders, tilted her head back. Glen looked steadfastly up into his eyes.

"Were you wonderin' if you had jumped out of the fryin' pan into the fire?" he asked whimsically.

"No," she said. "I was in the fire. No, I was wondering what was in *your* mind just then."

"You'll find out, by and by," he smiled. "I'll tell you. First off—"

He took away his arm. He wanted to kiss her. But he did not. Instead he turned matter of factly to the outspread pack and unearthed his war bag. From this he took underwear, a black sateen shirt, trousers, a pair of boots. Tommy Prior's clothing which he had taken for Glen knowing that Tommy was a slender boy. And Tommy was beyond need of clothes.

"Here's a change from the skin out," Mickey handed them to her. "Let's see what sort of a boy you make. The boots'll be a little big, but better to ride in than slippers."

He set about building a fire. Glen withdrew into the brush. Smoke drifted blue in the cool, sunrise air as he fed the flame with dry sticks. He brought a small pail of water from the creek and reached for his coffee pot. And while he bent over this Glen stepped out of the willow clump.

She carried in one hand the black lace dress, the satin slippers, a handful of things with a silken shimmer. She looked at Mickey and she looked down at them and with a quick gesture she cast them all in the fire. The flame licked up around the delicate fabrics.

Mickey stood silent, thoughtful, until the last shred of that finery turned to ash. And the girl's eyes turned to his direct, inquiring. She plucked at his shirt sleeve.

"Give me that coffee pot," she said. "I can cook. If I'm going to be a partner I want to be useful."

And that was the beginning.

Thirty days later they swam the Yellowstone at Miles City, traversed the Judith Basin, ferried the Missouri and rode into Fort Benton.

Mickey stayed in Benton long enough to buy a team and a wagon and load the box with staple groceries and sundry tools. And when he drove north over the backbone that lies between the Missouri and the Teton rivers he did not drive alone.

In a week he had enough logs cut and hauled for a cabin on the bank of the Teton. Before the first snow flew Glen went singing about homely tasks under her own roof.

LATE that fall old Ben Clarke blew into the Teton country. He had cattle everywhere, Texas, Colorado, Montana. He lived by and for cattle. He shuffled his herds about as a commander-in-chief disposes his battalions, enjoying the scope of his operations as much as the material advantage that accrued. Old Ben was at

heart a simple kindly soul, who secretly did good turns to various people. Mickey was the only son of Ben Clarke's youngest brother, who had lost out in a brush with Kiowa warriors when Mickey and Jessie Clarke were mere babies. Old Ben had brought them up, had watched Mickey rip and tear as a youth, with certain apprehensions.

He came to Mickey's place on the Teton from his own headquarters thirty miles above. He stayed two days, yarning with his nephew, watching Glen with his wise, understanding eyes.

"Why'n't you stay with the outfit, Mickey?" he asked, when he was saddled and ready to go. "Mudge wanted to go back south. I aimed for you to run this northern end."

"You didn't mention it, so I made other plans," Mickey grinned. "Anyway, Uncle Ben, I'm married and the head of a family. I'd rather be on my own hook. You didn't get to own cow outfits by runnin' 'em for somebody else, now did you?"

"You got any money?" the old man inquired.

"Enough to buy a couple of hundred two year old heifers in the spring," Mickey answered truthfully. "Start small and grow up with the country. That's my idea."

"Buy five hundred," old Ben advised. "I'll arrange for the Second National in Helena to let you have the money at five per cent. You can pay it back when you begin to ship beef. You got the right idea, Mickey. You got a good partner too, if I'm any judge."

"I sure have," Mickey said proudly. "You watch our smoke."

MANY a time in the future Mickey Clarke repeated that to himself, and to Glen. A year passed, three years, five. MC cattle increased and multiplied. No cloud ever rose on their personal horizon; no, not so much as one the bigness of an outspread hand. Mickey used to look at his small son flinging a tiny rope at the cat, at two flaxen haired baby girls and wonder how and why fate had been so kind to him—who had roistered across the Southwest, prying up hell and putting a stick under it. Then he would steal up on Glen and kiss her where the bronze gold hair curled at the nape of her white neck. They would look at each other and smile, for they never quite lost that blood quickening sense of each other that overtook them as they stood clinging together against the dark wall outside the Odeon in Clarke's Ford, long ago.

Their cabin became a comfortable ranch-house surrounded by fertile meadows. The five hundred heifers became ten thousand cattle on the range. Mickey Clarke grew to be a power in Choteau County, liked and respected. His wife was the first lady of that lonely land, a gracious, hospitable, beautiful woman.

Ten years from the time they looked down into the Teton valley and he pointed out to Glen the spot he had chosen, Mickey said to his wife:

"Goldenhair, we got the world by the tail with a downhill pull. We got to get ourselves a home in town and give these kids a chance to be something. Young Ben's eight. He ought to be in school. We've built the MC into somethin' solid. Let's enjoy it. Let's spread ourselves."

Glen nodded. She took things like that, placidly, hiding under an unmoved exterior a curious intensity that Mickey alone knew.

"We can rent a house in Helena till we build us a real home," Mickey went on. "We know lots of people there."

"I love this place, Mickey," she said. "It's part of us because we made it. We've been so happy here. This is home."

"You and me, old scout," he smiled, "would be happy most anywhere. Sure this is home. Always will be. But we're on Easy Street. We'll have us a town house, too."

With Mickey an idea formulated into a plan became immediate action. Two weeks from the evening he broached the subject to Glen before the fireplace at the Teton ranch, they were quartered in a hotel suite in the State capital, young

Ben and the two baby girls in charge of a competent nurse. Mickey and Glen hunted a house, found one on a noble hill overlooking Last Chance Gulch where the main street ran over ground from which gold miners had sluiced a hundred fortunes when buffaloes still darkened the plains.

They spent a riotous week furnishing that house. Money got no consideration. They had everything—and the best of their lives before them.

"I got to make a flyin' trip to Benton," Mickey said when they were properly settled. "They're shippin' the last bunch of beef. Want to come along?"

"You just try leaving me behind." Glen rumpled his brown hair. "Just try it, Mister Michael Clarke."

"Me and my shadow," Mickey anticipated the words of a song as yet unwritten. "We'll take that afternoon train."

Fort Benton sits on a flat by the Missouri River. The St. Louis steamers used to come up there after furs and buffalo hides and gold in the old days. It was an old post when the West was still young. But a railroad displaced the river traffic when cattle swarmed over the Northwest on the heels of the vanishing bison. The Montana Central skirts the town on a high bench. Mickey and Glen rolled down a steep hill in a hack to the Grand Union Hotel. Mickey registered. They followed a porter with their bags up to a room.

"I saw the boys' horses standin' in front of the Enterprise," Mickey said. "I'll amble over and see Murphy before they break back to camp."

He left Glen humming a song as she brushed her hair. As he walked past the desk front a man straightened up from the register. A big man, a good looking man, well dressed.

Mickey looked at him. For a second their eyes met. Then Mickey walked on. But not out. No, he went over to the lobby windows that faced on the river, and sat down to stare at the broad Missouri swirling over its gravel bed.

He thought of another river, wide and shallow, slinking over treacherous sands, where the Odeon flourished in the palmy days of Clarke's Ford. And he felt a little sick inside. The incredible, the impossible had happened. A ghost which he had thought forever laid was in the room. The ghost had looked him in the eye, and he knew, by some strange prescience what the ghost was thinking, calculating, and—unless the nature of the animal had changed, what the ghost would probably do.

If this apparition continued to walk the streets of Fort Benton, Glen would see it. And that was rather more than Mickey Clarke could bear to think about. Glen and her three babies and ten years of perfect companionship. Mickey had known every emotion the human heart can feel, except despair. And that is practically what gripped him as he stared through the window into the gathering dusk, asking himself what he should do about it—what he could do.

VII

A SHADOW came between Mickey and the window. He looked up. He was not surprised, only wary, expectant. A decade earlier he would have forced the issue instantly, reckless of consequence. Now he waited for his antagonist to show his hand. Those ten years had bestowed wisdom and patience and self-control on Mickey, without sapping his courage, or weakening his temper.

"You are Mr. Michael Clarke of the MC on the Teton, I understand?"

The voice had not changed. There was still arrogance in it, and something like a sneer.

Mickey nodded.

"Saw you and your wife come in," the voice continued. "Fine looking woman, Mrs. Clarke. Knew her slightly in the old days."

Mickey said nothing. He matched stares. The ghost looked natural, a shade older perhaps. He had removed his hat as if to give Mickey Clarke a good look to refresh his memory. His black

hair still curled thickly in tight rings. A really handsome and vigorous ghost. A miracle.

"I wonder if you happen to remember me?" Dubois continued.

Mickey made a quick forward motion of his head and body. His eyes blazed.

"What do you want, you dirty dog?" he asked.

"Ten thousand dollars," Duvenny said calmly. "Ten thousand dollars to stay dead."

So that was it. Mickey stared at him, thinking hard. Hush money. Blackmail.

Mickey Clarke had not become a successful man, almost a wealthy man, without realizing that a bought mouth is likely to fly open unless it is continually stuffed. He thought of Glen singing as she brushed her hair before the mirror upstairs and his heart swelled until it seemed as if it would choke him. Dubois eyed him shrewdly.

"I see you getting het up," he observed in an undertone. "I don't underestimate you, Clarke. You will notice that I have my hand in my coat pocket. I have a gun on your belly, Clarke. I'm taking no chances. You're the only man that ever beat me in a gunplay, and you'll never do that again. But you can buy me off. Ten thousand in cash to stay dead."

And still Mickey did not reply. He sat thinking, staring at this florid, curly haired wraith out of the past. But he was not thinking of himself. He thought about young Ben and the baby girls in Helena, and Glen waiting for him upstairs. He could not put his heel on this rattlesnake's head. Its dying rattle, the mere explanation of its killing, would bring Glen's bright world in ruins about her, and he wanted to spare her that. He rose slowly to his feet. Glen might come downstairs.

"Can't talk here," he said. "Follow me into the bar."

Dubois walked at his heels. They stopped at one end of the bar in an otherwise empty room, save for the man in a white apron industriously polishing glasses.

"You're a big man in Choteau County, Clarke. I've been looking you up. I know you're lightnin' with a gun, but I am fast enough to beat you, because I'll have you covered any time you're within shootin' distance of me, from now on. And it wouldn't save your bacon if you did get me. It would all come out. Anyway, you owe me more than ten thousand. You put me on my back in the Odeon. Before I got on my feet again, the crowd there stole me blind. You're gettin' off light at ten thousand."

"I will not give you a cent," Mickey said steadily. "Do your damndest. I went to the Odeon to kill you that night. I thought I had. This time I will make sure—if you bother me."

"How will it sound to everybody in this country," Dubois said, "if after you bump me off—which you'll never do a second time, unless you shoot me in the back when I'm not lookin'—you have to tell a judge and jury *why*. Because I came after you for runnin' away with my wife, livin' with her ten years, havin' three kids by her? The pair of you'd stand high in Montana after that, I guess."

"You lie," Mickey flung in his teeth. "She wasn't your wife. You tricked her, you black hearted, murdering liar."

"Talk's cheap. I don't mind admittin' I tricked her," Dubois replied coolly, with a shrug of his shoulders. "But not the way you think. I married her all right. I told her afterward it was all a fake—to tame her. She thought I'd put it over on her. I made her think so. But it was legal enough—an' your marriage ain't, my bold cattle king. Listen. I didn't start this without havin' things fixed. I knew you'd put my light out in a jiffy if you thought you could get away with it.

"But I got a woman in with me on this play. She's got the certificate—and I have told her the facts. If anything happens to *me*—she goes after you. Nice story that about Mrs. Clarke of the MC. And I can tell you right now, Clarke, that you can't stop it circulatin'—unless you pay to keep it quiet. If you don't—"

He made an expressive gesture with

his left hand. His right remained in his coat pocket. Mickey could see the outline of the short barreled gun. But that was nothing to him by comparison with Dubois statement. That sent a chill over him. If it were true— Until he found out for himself he must temporize.

"If I did give you hush money," Mickey said slowly, "you'd only come back for more. You'd bleed me. I might as well stand pat."

"Oh, I ain't a hog," Dubois said lightly. "I know a copper camp where I can start a joint with ten thousand, and make a cleanup. If it works out I won't trouble you no more. Of course," he grinned sardonically, "if I was to go broke I'd expect to come back and borrow a few thousand more. Come across, Clarke. I've got you where the hair is short—unless you want a nice ripe scandal about your family."

IN THE old days Mickey's gun would have come out smoking, win, lose or draw. He would not have listened to that vileness. But he could not settle it that way now—even if he had been armed. Not because he lacked nerve to take any chance however desperate. Oh no. Life had woven too many tendrils about him, that was all. He could not see himself making a move without destroying something that he valued above money, above everything, even his own pride and self-respect. He could not lay the ghost with a belching .45. In that moment, standing by the bar, sick at heart, he could only give a bribe to have his reputation and his love and his children left in peace.

"I'll give you a check for ten thousand, if you'll give me that marriage certificate and take the night train out of Fort Benton," Mickey said under his breath.

"No check goes. Cash." Dubois' dark eyes glowed in triumph. "Cash in hand."

"No bank open till morning," Mickey said.

"Get it in the morning, then," Dubois instructed. "I will be in the Silver Dollar Saloon at twelve o'clock tomorrow. I'll keep out of sight till then."

"You had better," Mickey warned him. "She thinks you're dead. I had her told you were dead. If she sees you and recognizes you, the stuff is off. I will go after you if it is the finish of everything. I will kill you anyway if you ever show up again, or open your mouth. That's a promise. And I have never made a promise to any man that I didn't keep."

"Oh, I'll keep out of sight," Dubois agreed. "I am not goin' to spoil a ten thousand dollar deal for myself. I need the money."

Mickey turned away. He had to get away or something in him would crack. And he had nothing but his hands. He had not carried a gun in town for five years. But Dubois stayed him.

"You must have a few *pesos* in your jeans," he said boldly. "I'd like to play a little faro while I'm waitin' your pleasure."

Mickey laid two fifty dollar bills on the bar and walked out. If he tarried longer he would leap at Dubois bare handed and try to strangle him.

His temples throbbed, his head ached when he walked into the room upstairs.

"Heavens, Mickey, what's the matter?" Glen demanded, the moment she saw his face.

"Don't feel so good," he mustered up a wry smile. "Head started achin' all of a sudden."

"Lie down here on the bed," Glen commanded.

She sat beside him, stroking his temples with cool, soft fingers and that fever of rage and disgust and desperation died out of Mickey. He drew her head down and kissed her.

"You're better than a college of physicians and surgeons," he said. "I feel all right now. We better go and have supper."

"Let's have it sent up," Glen suggested. "I'd just as soon stay right here in this room."

So they had a tray brought in. Glen curled up beside him in a kimono after they finished. Mickey smoked a cigaret. They did not talk much. They seldom needed to voice their feelings.

Late in the evening Mickey looked at Glen's face snuggled against his shoulder, her head pillowed on his arm. She was all but asleep, happy, contented, resting in unquestioned security. He stared at her and that ferment began again in his mind. Wordlessly he cursed that clanking skeleton. They had conquered the past. Materially and spiritually the future was whatever they chose to make it. And it would all be as nothing, worse than nothing. Mickey suddenly had a conviction that Dubois would play with them, suck money from them, vampire fashion, until it suited him to blast them with the ignoble weapons in his merciless hand, just as he had blasted the horse wrangler in Few Trees long ago. And it was an affront to Mickey, as well as a concrete danger to Glen, that such a man should walk the earth, much less hold a club like that over his head.

He stirred uneasily.

"Better turn in," he told Glen. "I'm goin' out for awhile."

"I'll wait for you," she answered drowsily. "Don't stay too long, dear."

True, Mickey had not carried a gun on his person for many a moon. But he carried one in a saddle pocket when he rode, and in his bag when he traveled. The habit of a lifetime is not easily abandoned. There had been many years when Mickey Clarke felt unclothed without a gunbelt around his waist. And the same old black handled .45 that he had packed up the trail was tucked within the waistband of his trousers when he walked downstairs and out of the Grand Union.

For it had come over him like a wave that he could not buy off Dubois. He would not stay bought. The thought of him weaving his web in the background for Glen's undoing roused Mickey to a fury that went beyond reason, that demanded instant and sweeping reprisal that would wipe Dubois out of the picture forever.

Perhaps there was a touch of primitive passion about that. But mostly it was the bitter clear certainty that a tiger in the jungle, a poisonous snake coiled to strike, and a blackmailer at his foul business can not be temporized with. Dubois would make his life a hell of apprehension. Ultimately Glen would learn, and her shame and pain would tear Mickey's heart to bits. He knew that—at least he felt it, and feeling is a dynamic force greater than reason or logic.

If the Lord said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay," man has been assuming the prerogative of the Lord since the beginning of human society, and by and large there are forms of vengeance which any man can justify to his own conscience and which his fellows will justify also. So Mickey set out upon the streets of Fort Benton with a passionate resolution to stop a foul mouth forever, even though he destroyed himself in the attempt. His head cooled as he crossed a grassy plot north of the Grand Union, but his determination was as deep and abiding as the night he rode into Clarke's Ford to avenge the murder of a harmless boy who had been his friend. Only he did not think of it concretely as vengeance—simply as an act to be performed in defense of something he valued greatly, as a man defends his house against a plundering robber.

THE MAIN street of Fort Benton fronted on the river. The motley business of a frontier town lined that street, saloons, stores, restaurants, postoffice. But the saloons were most numerous, and Mickey began at the upper end and looked into them all as he passed.

Dubois was not in the Silver Dollar, nor the Bucket of Blood, nor the Red House. But in the last Mickey encountered his range boss and half a dozen of his men. The MC lay on the bench north of town with twelve hundred beef to ship in the morning. He could not avoid his riders. They held him in talk.

And, as they talked, leaning on the bar in this frontier club, a side door opened and a man entered with a woman. Mickey saw them in the back bar mirror. It was Dubois. The woman was not much more

than a girl, twenty-two or three, slender, brown haired. But she carried the indelible marks of her type, which functioned across the alley from the Red House Saloon. Both had been drinking. It was implicit in the brightness of their eyes, their carriage. John Barleycorn had lifted them out of themselves. Liquor had abolished Dubois' habitual caution. His attention was all upon the girl. He put his arm about her and strode to the bar.

"Set 'em up all round," he commanded, and the bartender began to do his bidding.

"Huh. Celebratin'. That curly haired stiff cracked the faro bank in the Bucket of Blood for eight hundred dollars tonight," Bill Pollard muttered at Mickey's elbow.

Mickey scarcely heard the words. Dubois stood at the bar only three removes. His brain worked fast. He would get between those riders and Dubois, stand at his elbow, look him in the eye and spill his liquor, spit in his face, slap him—anything would serve to rouse that tiger and make him bare his claws. And then Mickey would kill him, or be killed himself. What came after could be no worse than living with Dubois' shadow over him and Glen. He saw, in that hour, no other way out.

But as he moved ever so little, to make his shift of position seem casual, unpremeditated, that side door opened again to admit another woman, a faded blonde in a scarlet dress, with a yellow drape over her bare shoulders. Mickey saw this in the mirror, with that part of his vision that was not focused upon Dubois.

And he saw Dubois draw the brown haired girl up to him and kiss her, after which he lifted his glass and uttered his ancient toast, half defiance, half mockery—

"Confusion to the enemy!"

"You hound!"

Dubois turned at the voice, his arm still around the girl. The smile faded from his face. The corners of his lips drew up in a snarl. He made an imperative gesture toward the door with his free hand.

The woman in scarlet walked toward them.

"So that's the way it is, eh?" she breathed.

And suddenly the hand under the yellow drape thrust out. A gun barked. Twice. Dubois put his hand to his throat, swayed, pitched forward on his face, without a sound, as a tree goes down under the last stroke of the ax. The girl put both hands to her breast and screamed, bending herself backward over the bar. And the woman in scarlet shot Dubois again as he lay on the floor—and then turned the gun against herself.

But that was a matter in which the MC riders could interfere, and did, as men instinctively check self-destruction. They caught her before she could pull the trigger, disarmed her, held her as she struggled with insensate frenzy to get free, incoherent phrases pouring from her lips, until she went limp in their grip and began to sob.

"Go get Doc Mullen," Mickey commanded Bill Pollard. "He was in the Silver Dollar ten minutes ago. Then you better go notify Tom Coats there's been a killing."

He bent over Dubois. Blood crept over the floor in a thin trickle. But Mickey would not touch him. He drew back, gave his attention to the wounded girl. Two of his men supported her while another brought a chair. She sat in that, pressing her hands to her breast, moaning.

An active man could cover Fort Benton's principal street in three minutes. Pollard was scarcely gone before he returned, Doc Mullen at his heels, bag in hand. The medico turned Dubois on his back, took one searching look at his eyes, felt his heart, rose with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Dead as a mackerel," he said, and turned to the girl.

While he worked over her, sleeves rolled, a basin and a bucket of water at hand, Tom Coats and a deputy came. The madam in charge of the house across the alley burst in, moaning over her Rose.

"That damned Platte Lily," she vocif-

erated. "Boys, there ain't no man ever breathed that's worth shootin'. The crazy, jealous fool!"

Mickey bent over Dubois again. He had no interest in two light women contesting over a worthless man. But it seemed incredible that fate should strike over his shoulder when he was poised to strike for himself. Yet it was so. He looked into those glazed eyes. That ghost would never walk again.

THEY carried the dead man away to the back of the room. Doc Mullen ordered the girl taken to a bed in the house where she lived. The deputy and the sheriff asked a few questions and the deputy led the Platte Lily away to the county jail.

Mickey followed the madam out on the walk that ran to the rear.

"Know this fellow that was shot?" he asked. "Who was he?"

"Naw," she said. "Some tinhorn that blew in here a few days ago with this here Platte Lily. Called himself Ford. I wish he'd broke his neck gettin' off the train. He was a good looker that was plumb bad, I guess. But Lily must 'a' had a case on him to go gunnin' because he started to fool around with Rose. Damn their hides!"

Mickey went back inside. His brain was working more clearly now, anticipating contingencies.

"Wonder if you'd mind walkin' up to the calaboose with me, Tom?" he said to the sheriff. "I'd like to talk to this Platte Lily, if it don't make any difference to you."

"Sure," Coats agreed. He was a mountain of a man, a genial giant that even malefactors whom he had to pursue and arrest liked and respected. "You know this here deceased, Mickey?"

"I have a hunch I knew something about him a long time back, down South," Mickey admitted. "That's what I want to find out from this woman, if she knows."

They walked up the street and turned into the brick building that was at once county offices and jail.

"Bring that there lead slingin' female into my office," Coats ordered a deputy. "I guess I'll kinda question her about this killin' myself, after you're through, Mickey."

Coats left them together. Mickey looked at the Platte Lily with a touch of pity. She was thirty or more, pretty once, Mickey thought, but faded now—her only redeeming feature two big, burning blue eyes, that looked into space past him, as if she saw something terrible there.

Curiously enough, while Mickey was considering how to begin, she shook herself out of that abstraction and spoke to him.

"I suppose they'll hang me," she said lifelessly.

"I don't think so," Mickey reassured him. "I guess you had provocation. And they don't hang women in this country."

"I went crazy," she said dully. "But, oh, I couldn't stand it. I couldn't! I stuck to him through hell and high water, and he wanted to ditch me for her."

"How long did you know him?" Mickey asked.

"Four years."

"Do you know anything about his history back ten years or so ago?" he went on.

She shook her head.

"Do you know why he came to Fort Benton?" Mickey persisted.

"We just blew in here," she answered listlessly. "He was a pretty good gambler when he was in luck. He thought there might be some pickin's."

"Listen, now," Mickey took a new tack, hope rising in his mind that after all Dubois had lied to him, bluffed him. "My name is Michael Clarke. I own a cow outfit in this country. I am married to one of the finest women on earth. I have three children. I met this man once in western Texas. He had a different name then. He came here to make a deal with me. He thought he had some information I'd be willing to pay for. Does that mean anything to you? Did he

never talk to you about Mickey Clarke—about somethin' that happened in a place called Clarke's Ford ten years ago?"

"I don't remember," she muttered. "It wouldn't mean anything to me if he did. He was a devil from hell, and still—Oh, Gawd, I wisht I was dead! I wisht I was dead!"

She put her face in her hands and burst into hysterical sobbing. Mickey stepped into the outer office.

"Can't make any headway with her," he said to Coats. "I thought I knew that *hombre*, but it seems not. And it doesn't matter anyhow. I'll toddle along to the hotel. Excitement enough for one evening."

"I guess I'll turn in m'self," Coats yawned. "Just about to hit the pillow when this fuss come off. Say, Sam, put her back in the tank. Give her a shot of whisky to quiet her, if she wants it. Gosh, these light ladies that go gunnin' for their tinhorn men give me a pain."

They parted at the first corner. Mickey walked across to the square bulk of the Grand Union, facing on the river. The stars were out. The cool autumn wind fanned his face. A hush lay over river and town like a great peace after a storm.

Mickey looked up at the same constellation he gazed upon as he sat his horse before the door of the Odeon in Clarke's Ford that summer night.

"I meant to kill him then, and I thought I did," he muttered. "I meant to kill him tonight. I would have been justified. A snake is a snake. Yet it seems as if it was not for me to do. Funny, how a man brings things on himself. You'd think somebody was runnin' the show that let's 'em go so far—an' then stops 'em cold. Glen'll never be troubled by them old days. Never. She's outlived it and she'll never be troubled by it now."

He bared his head as if invoking the silent stars, as near to breathing a prayer of thankfulness as it was in him. Glen would be lying with her copper gold hair tumbled on the pillow, waiting for him.

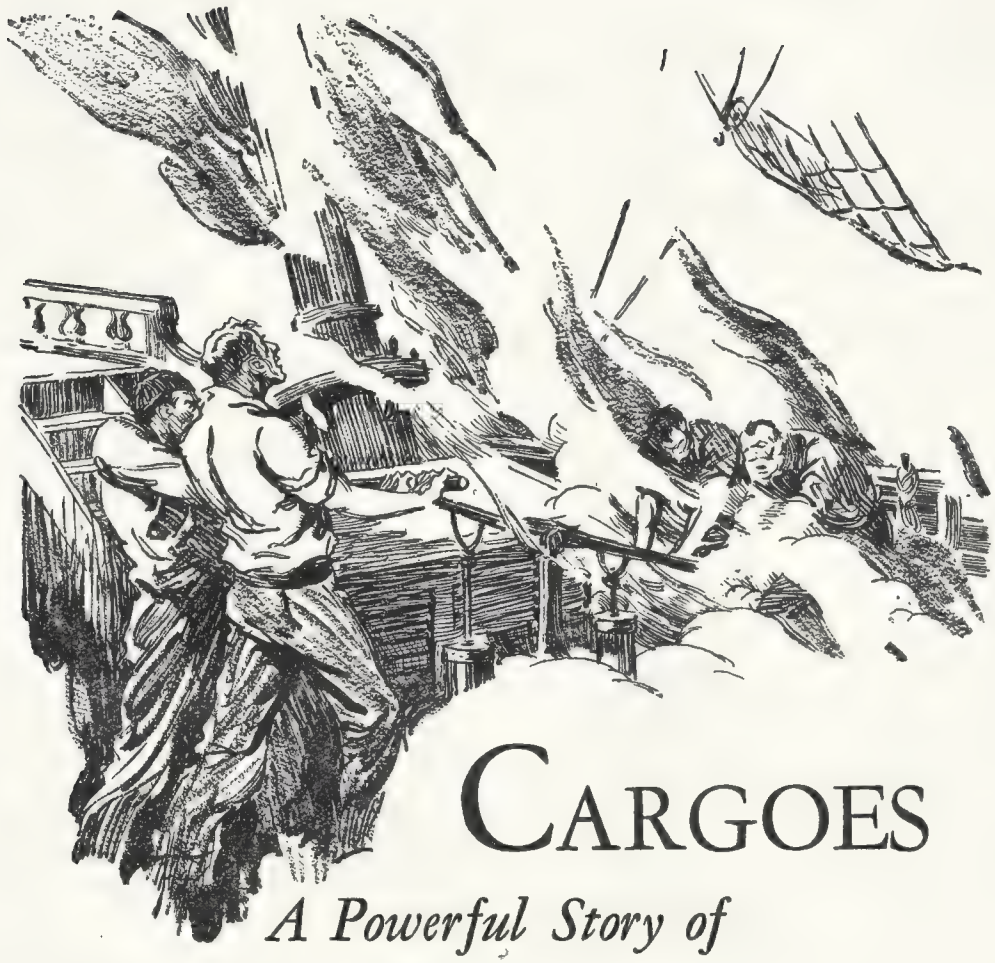
Confusion to the enemy! The enemy was confounded at last, snared and destroyed by his own deeds.

Mickey took a last glance up at the bright stars, at the river hurrying by, at the glowing windows of the town behind him. Then he entered the lobby and mounted the stairs.

Glen smiled at him, wide eyed, wakeful. He bent over to kiss her.

"Why, Mickey," she exclaimed, "your heart's beating like anything."

"I ran up the stairs," he smiled. "Gettin' old an' short winded, I guess. Well, we'll take the mornin' train home, Goldenhair. I've done transacted all my business here."



CARGOES

A Powerful Story of Windjammer Days

By CAPTAIN DINGLE

THE *PERSEUS* went to sea with a subdued, aged Old Man in command. As the ship warped out of the slip with the tug alongside, Nicholas Tranter stood on the poop, rubbing his thin hands, grinning toothfully, casting glances of pride at the important figure of his precious son on the forecastle head.

"He'll make you a fine mate, Captain," Tranter said.

"I'll see that he does," retorted Captain Ord savagely. "I'll see to that."

"He'd make a fine captain, too," the shipowner hinted, nettled at the other's tone.

The skipper hurried out of range, to swallow that thinly veiled threat. When the end of the pier was reached, Tranter grew impatient, glancing shoreward when he was not scanning the various river craft.

"You figger on going back in the tug, don't you?" the skipper growled presently.

The presence of Tranter on the poop was an outrage to his sailorly soul.

"I was waiting to bid goodby to Miss Doris," Tranter replied.

His foxy, fatherly eye roved and settled upon his son again. No mistake, there was vim and ginger in every line of the new chief mate's figure. He had been to a good tailor for his new uniform. Reluctantly the proud father turned from his offspring to scan the boats. And, amazingly, there was a shrewd, satisfied smile on the face of the aged skipper.

"You'll have some wait, mister," said Ord. "Doris is staying home this voyage. Better hail a boat."

"But—but I thought—you said—" stuttered Tranter, pasty white with rage. Ord stopped him.

"You thought nothing good, I'll be bound. What I said was that in consideration o' you renewing my note for one more voyage, I'd put up with your precious Jake as first mate, and take up the note or sell out to you when the ship returns."

"The girl never stopped ashore before. She—"

"She asks no permission of you when she does," snapped the skipper angrily. "My daughter's nothing to you or yours, nor ever will be. Hear that! And you're hindering the ship, mister. Hear that? Hey, you rowboat! Haul alongside and take a passenger off."

Tranter managed a grin. It was compounded of fury, chagrin, venom and vengeance. It was a grin to turn red devils green with jealousy.

"All right, Captain. I won't give you the chance you're aching for to chuck me overboard. I'll have a little chat with you next time we meet. You won't refuse a father a few words with his son, I hope?"

"Make 'em short and sharp. I'm telling the tug to go ahead. By the last weevil in the last pantile, I'm skipper here yet!"

The skipper might have been in low water when he had to beg renewal of that note of old Tranter; he might have felt obliged to accept young Tranter as mate, as a condition of the renewal. But he was not Tranter's man yet. He was still his own daughter's father.

FROM Santos, where the *Perseus* delivered her cargo, two letters went north. Before Captain Ord sealed and mailed his letter, he read over once again the brief, shy, glad little note he had got from Doris. Then he added to his epistle:

> P.S. You tell that young sweetheart of yours I said if he's half as good a man as his uncle Peter Owens was, maybe I'll consider him for a son-in-law. P.P.S. Tell him he'd better be.

What was contained in the bulky letter which Jake Tranter mailed to his father was not for the world to see. But in the body of Captain Ord's letter to his daughter the story of the voyage, so far, was told. It told Doris of a quick, pleasant, profitable passage out. It spoke of surprising harmony between the new mate and the old crew. It hinted, rather reluctantly, that young Tranter had proved not so bad as expected, that he had gone out of his way to be agreeable and efficient. Also the letter mentioned that Tranter had dug up an acquaintance, and that the acquaintance was putting a valuable cargo of coffee and ore on board for the return passage.

Captain Ord licked the envelop. Then he took out the letter again with a whimsical smile and added yet another postscript:

> P.P.P.S. (Begins to look like Pea Soup, Dodo!) I was going to tell you to make sure young Owens will be a good provider. But I guess I won't. If he's deep sea diving for that big salvage firm, he's got to be both steady and industrious. So I'll just warn you that a diver's life ain't all roses and sunshine, and I want my girl to have plenty of them. You just tell him I said for him not to be in no hurry to carry you off yet awhile, but to sail in like sixty and get on so they'll take him out of the diving end and clap him to the managing end of the business.
>
> P.P.P.P.S. I feel a bit sorry for Jake Tranter. He tries hard to please me. Guess he's in love at that. Maybe I shall keep him on as mate even after I pay off his old shark of a father next time home.

MR. JAKE TRANTER cut a sorrier figure on sailing day than he had since joining the ship as mate. The shipper of the cargo, or at least the man who had given the cargo to the *Perseus*, was at the ship to bid his friend goodby. Tranter had come aboard the night before in hilarious mood. He was less hilarious by daylight; and his friend brought down a bottle of stuff calculated to turn the grayest dawn into gorgeous sunshine.

"I don't approve of it, Mr. Tranter," the skipper protested when the mate had invited him to drink. "You better tell your friend goodby and let him take the rest of the stuff away."

"Hell, what do you care?" came the surprising retort from the model mate. "He gave you a good cargo, didn't he? You old walruses who stay at sea a lifetime get moss grown in your notions. I'll make a change when I'm master, believe me."

With difficulty Captain Ord mastered his anger. He knew, none better, what a good cargo meant to him that voyage. He had already reckoned up freights and expenses; he had almost decided how much he could afford toward giving Doris a handsome start in life. And he knew that but for young Tranter's friend, the old *Perseus* might have waited long for such a cargo.

"I am well aware of what I owe your friend," he said. "I have thanked him. I shall do my best to deliver his goods intact and in good shape, sir. But taking his freight doesn't obligate me to permit him to break the rules of the ship. Square rigged, that's my business code, Mr. Tranter. Nothing close hauled or sneaky about my methods. So I don't have to back one fathom from my mark to oblige anybody. Remember you're mate of this ship, this is sailing day, and I don't permit my officers to drink rum while on duty. Tell your friend that, sir. Then you may begin getting the anchor."

Young Tranter laughed. But there was that about the Old Man's aspect which compelled obedience. The agent grinned when Tranter bade him goodby, but offered his hand to the skipper in a businesslike manner. Tranter went forward, bawling for hands to man the capstan.

"Sorry if I transgressed your rule, Cap'n," said the agent. "Old-timers in this trade are not quite so strict. A good passage to you. Hope to see you again."

"If you see me again, young man, I hope you'll remember that my officers don't drink on sailing day," the skipper returned.

"Oh, nonsense. When your officer happens to be the son of your—" The agent abruptly stopped, biting his lip. He waved a hand toward Tranter and trotted down the accommodation ladder into the shore boat, leaving Captain Ord glaring after him.

"Ho, Sally Brown, she's a bright mulatter,"

screamed the negro cook perched on the capstan head. Old Socky knew all the chanteys. He would rather sing than cook. The men tramped around him, heaving upon their long handspikes.

"Way-hay roll and go!
"Ho, she drinks rum an' chaws terbacker!
"Spent all ma money on Sally Brown!"

Feeling his good old ship again moving under him, the skipper cast off his moodiness. He had a good cargo under hatches. It was not made up of little shipments; all the coffee was consigned to one firm, the ore to another agent. Nothing remained but to carry it safely and speedily to port. A fresh breeze blew over the quarter; the good clipper hurled the seas roaring from her bows.

"Oh, heah she comes, she's a flash fast packet!"

yelled Socky at the main topgallant halyards. And the watch hauled lustily.

"Blow, boys, blow!"
"Oh, heah she comes, she's a flash fast packet!"
"Blow, my bully boys, blow!"

"We'll make a good passage, Mr. Tranter," Captain Ord remarked, when the gear was coiled and the decks cleared.

"Good enough, if I can help make it," returned Tranter, smiling queerly.

The skipper missed the warm congeniality that had ruled for years in the after guard. Tranter had shaped up well on the outward passage; except for a bit of insolence when under the influence of shore parties he had behaved very well indeed. And the skipper was inclined to overlook that one offense. The mate had even shown unexpected qualities in his work. Truly, he did not compare with solid old Peter Owens; but then, first mates like Peter were becoming scarce. The crew, with a few exceptions, had sailed in the *Perseus* for years. The new men had shaped up about as well as the mate; no better, but good enough. They could all steer, haul on a rope, draw a bucket of water without losing the bucket overboard, and wangle a broom. There were enough good men to take care of any bit of seamanship needed, and when it was a matter of furling or reefing, three good men and three not so good could manage to handle four men's work at a pinch.

THERE was no genial intercourse aft. The second mate had the diffidence of all good second mates. He was shy of making free with his captain, even though given encouragement to chat. He would rather tuck a long splice in a wire hawser than hold converse with the skipper for five minutes. It was not that he was lacking in speech. The men forward respected him for the sheer artistry of his deep water vocabulary. And Tranter, willing enough to talk, too willing at times, always gave the skipper a feeling of helpless uncertainty. There was forever lurking in his background the sinister figure of old Nicholas Tranter. Sincerity and the name of Tranter seemed incongruous, somehow. In these circumstances, old Socky achieved an intimate relation with the captain, which grew with every meal he served in the cabin. No steward had been shipped when Doris decided to stay ashore for a voyage. It was the loyal negro who volunteered to handle the duties in addition to his own, and at no increase in wages. Socky served breakfast to the skipper alone on the morning after sailing day.

"Heah, Cap'n," he grinned, "dem tripe ain't goin' to las' long. I made 'em into fritters fo' you."

Tripe fritters were among the skipper's favored delicacies, more particularly since his teeth had broken stowage. Socky watched him. He ate with a good appetite. The ship leaned easily to the hard breeze. There was a musical thrumming of racing seas heard through the open ports. Sunshine flooded the wide, white decks seen through the open main deck doors. The log slate for the night showed gratifying progress. The barometer stood steady. Chips had reported no water in the holds.

"Cap'n, doan' leave none o' them fritters," urged Socky. "I got good cracker hash fo' the officahs."

He shoved over the dish, shifting the fork around handy to the skipper's grasp. And when the dish was empty, the old negro chattered on:

"Dawggone ef't ain't the queerest cahgo I ever see. I was down the hold this mo'nin' breakin' out a bag o' taters, an' that ore is stowed right aft. Dawggone ef't ain't nawthin' but bags o' dirt, Cap'n. Jes' common trash."

"That dirt is valuable, Socky," smiled the skipper. "That's ore."

"Huh! Down Turks Island, whar I come from, we shovels that stuff into ships fo' ballas'! Dawggone ef yo' couldn't grow onions into it."

"Better not try, Socky. You'd break your teeth on them onions."

"Dawggone!" the darky laughed jovially. "Yo' will have yo' little fun, Cap'n. Man, I ain't got no teeth lef'. No, suh, not a one. Why, I cain't chaw my terbacker onless I put it through the meat grinder first. Break ma teeth on onions! Yo' surely has yo' joke with old Socky."

But still those bags of ore puzzled him. He gathered up the empty dishes in his two great paws and bore them to the galley, muttering to himself.

WHEN Captain Ord took his sextant on deck for the noon observation, the watch below were getting their dinner from the galley. The *Perseus* maintained her reputation for good feeding of the crew. Complaints were rare. But on this morning something went wrong. Loud voices arose about the galley door, a seaman reached inside with closed fist, mouthing a foul word, and in an instant he was out, scattering his two messmates, with old Socky at his heels. A smear of blood was on the darky's cheek; his eyes glared; his toothless mouth was open, and words jerked from it as he overtook the flying sailor.

"I don't allow no Tranter trash to talk that way about Cap'n Ord, no suh! An' I don't 'low nobody a-tall, to swipe ma mug wid his fistes. Yo' learn that lessum."

With each sentence the cook slapped the sailor hard on the side of the head with one or other of his great flat hands; and to punctuate the "lessum" he delivered one terrific kick upon the sailor's rear with a hard bare foot which deposited the recipient at the forecastle door wrong end up.

Everybody on deck saw it. Mr. Tranter ran forward, seized Socky roughly, and threatened him with everything from irons to hanging.

"That'll do, Mister! Bring him to me!" the skipper roared.

He had seen the blood on his old cook's face. The sailor was a new hand. As between the two, defense unheard, he leaned toward his tried servant.

Tranter followed Socky aft. The men, bawling for their dinners a moment before, stood about the deck gazing aft. The beaten sailor, from a safe distance, vowed vengeance upon the darky and got no attention.

"What's the trouble, Cook?" the skipper demanded sharply.

"Ain't no trouble, Cap'n. That no 'count Tranter trash—"

"Stop! What are you blathering about? That man's name is— What is his name, Mr. Tranter?"

"Mulligan," snapped the mate. "Don't matter what his name is, does it? Is this nigger to manhandle the men as he—"

"I'll ask your opinion when I want it, Mister," the skipper cut in. "What's this about, Socky?" Socky glared unafraid at the fuming mate.

"This yer Mulligan jes' jine this ship. He useta sail with Tranter in ol' *Ariel*. He ain't got no business a-growlin' at good food. Them Tranter ships ain't fed aft like we feed 'em for'ard. No, suh! This yer Mulligan 'low the soup was bilge, an' I tell him he got wuss'n that in jail. He say next v'yage there ain't goin' be no dirty nigger in the cabin. Cap'n Tranter don't 'low no black cowson to be round his young missus. Then he say Miss Doris goin' be missus, an' I say he's a liar. 'N then he poke me in the chops an' I run him outa th' galley."

Tranter laughed unpleasantly.

"You're not taking his word, are you, Cap'n?" The tone angered the Old Man.

"Yes, against the word of any man in the ship, Mister!" he retorted. "This Mulligan fellow asked for what he got. If he's an old shipmate of yours, give him a word of advice. I don't want my daughter's name to be bandied about by focsle hands. And I won't have her name connected with the name of Tranter by anybody!"

Tranter shrugged his shoulders.

"Tranter's a good name," he said. "It stands for—"

"I could tell you what it stands for, Mister!" the Old Man cut in. "I want no argument from you in my own ship. Socky, you may go to your work. That'll do, Mr. Tranter! You forget yourself."

Captain Ord lost his noon observation that day. For three days after that the skies were slatey or black; the sea made up and the wind blew furiously. The *Perseus* battled stoutly under three lower topsails, reefed upper main topsail, and foretopmast staysail, reeling, filling her decks to the rails of her six foot bulwarks, drenching her topsails, and bringing anxiety to her captain's eyes.

The anxiety was not for the ship. It

was for the safety of his precious cargo. The *Perseus* could outstorm the gale itself in the hands of a master who knew her. Her decks might be seething under tons of hissing brine, her cabins wet and dismal, her forecastle a den of dripping misery; the ship itself, as a fabric, as a living, moving whole, would hurl back the ocean's bitterest assault with that glorious prow if only the guiding hand held true. But her cargo— So much depended upon that cargo. And coffee, fine coffee, was ruined by salt water.

"Mr. Tranter, please look to the hatch fastenings," said the skipper for the tenth time.

The gale was at its peak. The very seas were flattened by the wind. The mate looked gray.

"It's more than a man's life is worth to go down there now," he grumbled.

The decks were waist deep in furious, rope tangled avalanches of water that thundered aboard almost without let-up. The carpenter made his way aft along the monkey bridge. His sou'wester hung from a button by its strap, his forehead was gashed.

"Carpenter's shop's gone, sir," he reported. "Sea lifted it clear over my head."

"Can't be helped, Chips," the skipper said. "Can you come with me to look to the hatches?"

"Aye-aye, sir!" responded Chips, and clapped his sou'wester over his battered head.

He hauled tight his "soul-and-body" lashing—the bit of rope yarn about the waist which keeps the sea partly out of the sailor's trousers and boots. The skipper cut a bit of line from a signal halyard for his own lashing, and together those two old men plunged into the fury of the main deck to make sure that every iron batten was tightly wedged, that no corner of tarpaulin gave a hold to the insistent, snatching fingers of sea or gale.

Beaten down they were, again and again. From mizzen hatch to main hatch, and from main to fore—even to forepeak hatch they battled their stubborn way. Above the uproar of the sea and clashing gear the sharp blows of old Chip's maul could be heard, driving home the wedges.

Mulligan at the wheel grinned. Mr. Tranter laughed out loud.

THE GALE broke. The *Perseus* picked up the trades and sped north. Socky killed a sheep on the first fine day. He knelt in the waterways, all bloody, ripping the pelt from the dead animal with a murderous looking knife. Not more than two fathoms distant, three seamen labored with marlinespike and fid, tucking a splice in a broken wire. One man had sailed in the ship for years. One was Mulligan, one was another man new that voyage. And they were quarreling as they worked. Bitter names were passed; the old seaman gripped his marlinespike threateningly.

"Ho, de debbil an' me we cain't agree,
Glory halleluiah!
Fo' I hates him an' he hates me,
Glory halleluiah!"

Old Socky sang loudly, his gleaming black eyes turned full upon the disputants. Mulligan started toward him with a curse.

"Shut yer yapper, you black—" he snarled. Old Socky interrupted him.

"Glory! Misto Mulligan, I jes' as soon stick a pig as a sheep, yes, suh! Back up, back up!"

The reeking knife glistened in the sunlight. Socky ran his big thumb along the blade suggestively, and Mulligan backed up, growling fearful things.

"Sing halleluiah, shout halleluiah, glory halleluiah!
I hates him an' he hates me, glory halleluiah!"

Socky sang until the skinning of the sheep was done. Mulligan grinned evilly.

"Sing, you black image!" he snarled. "Soon you'll be singin' th' other side o' yer face!"

"Yes, suh," was the happy retort, "I always sings wid both sides ma face."

"Sing halleluiah, shout halleluiah, glory halleluiah!
I hates him an' he hates me, glory halleluiah!"

AS THE ship drew homeward, the crew divided into two factions. Mulligan headed one, composed of the men, with two of the younger old hands who had the grace to appear ill at ease whenever they met either the skipper or old Socky. These men seemed to find much favor with the mate. Easy jobs went to the mate's watch. With each hundred miles of northing made, the skipper found something fresh to find fault with about the way the ship's work was being done. And Tranter's insolence increased.

"Sooner we gits home, sooner we hits the rusty nail on th' haid, *blam!*" said Socky as he served the skipper's supper one calm evening.

"Don't mistake Mulligan's red head for the head of that rusty nail," smiled the skipper. "Leave well enough alone. Another few days will see us home, Socky, and there won't be any rusty nails next voyage, nor any more, I hope." Getting near home, and the near prospect of lifting the financial clouds from his bark of business, livened Captain Ord up a lot. He felt well, and let his old retainer know it. "I'll make enough money out of this good voyage to put us all four square with the world, Socky. We've been close hauled for funds, but we can lift sheets, square yards, and run for fair harbor now, you doggone old nigger!"

"Yes, suh. Doggone ol' niggah, that's me," muttered Socky as he carried away the dishes. "Don' know nothin', that's right. We ain't carried no bags o' dirt befo', no, suh!"

Captain Ord laughed indulgently. His old cook had always been stubborn in an opinion. On one voyage, when the ship loaded a full cargo of railroad iron that had got rusty in transit from mills to wharf, nothing could ever persuade old Socky that the shippers were not in league to ruin the skipper for the insurance. Now he would carry to his grave the notion that those bags of ore were nothing more than dirt.

Late that night Captain Ord went on deck. The ship was near enough to soundings to make him restless until he secured some definite fix of position. The night was bright with the radiance of a full moon. There was sufficient breeze to drive the ship along easily with gently lifting sails. Across the decks lay bars of sharp ruled shadow; rigging, sails and yards were touched with silver. The mate was uncovering the sounding machine, a seaman standing by with the sinker and tube. It was a night, and a situation, to send a thrill through the Old Man's breast. He looked around, taking in every detail of his beloved old ship, and he saw that the forward canvas was braced in slovenly fashion. He was about to call the mate's attention to it, when he caught sight of smoke rising from the forward ventilators. Looking more closely, he was sure.

"Mr. Tranter!" he cried. "Is that smoke for'ard?"

"It looks like it," the mate replied, looking up. "I saw it before, and took it for moon gleam." He released the brakes of the sounding machine and the wire whizzed out.

"Took it for—have you not made sure?" exclaimed the skipper, aghast.

He was already at the ladder, bound forward. The mate looked up and laughed; the helmsman and the sailor at the machine laughed with him, and there was no reproof. The weight had scarcely reached bottom when Captain Ord's voice was heard shouting.

"Come here, Mr. Tranter! Call all hands. Tell Chips to rig the hose and bring his top maul. The ship's on fire!"

"Go ahead and wind in that wire," the mate ordered the sailor at the winch.

He went himself and called the second mate, telling him to call all hands and see what the Old Man wanted. Then Tranter went back to the sounding machine and read the depth on the graduated scale applied to the pressure tube. The second mate glanced at him curiously on his way forward. Perhaps he thought it queer that a first mate should be fiddling with a sounding machine when the ship was

presumably on fire and even the captain was at the scene of danger.

At the fore hatch the crew gathered, whispering together. Chips uncovered a corner of the hatch, thrust the hose through the opening, and wormed his way after it. Already the smoke rose in dense, choking volume, laden with pungent coffee aroma. Chips called for a hand to pass the hose along, and old Socky went in like a dark shadow. The smoke thickened. Through the opening the red of a blaze flickered. The call came for more help, and Captain Ord thrust a leg over the coaming.

"Not you, Captain; it's my job," declared Tranter, and forced his way past the skipper and through the hatch.

Right beside the skipper the second mate uttered a good, ripping, salty oath expressing amazement and unbelief; and at the heels of Tranter he went, too.

"If that guy's what I think he is, I want to be handy," the second mate muttered as he vanished.

What else he said was lost in the smoke and the hiss of steam, for the water was turned on, and Chips and Socky played valiantly on the fire. With all the officers forward, the helmsman let the ship swing into the wind. The fire began to roar, and Captain Ord hurried aft to get the ship off before the wind again. He must keep the fire forward at all costs. That would minimize the danger. He found nobody at the wheel. The sounding weight and rod lay on the deck where they were dropped. The glass tube was broken. He hove up the helm, and arrested the swinging of the ship just before she was taken aback. Then he steered, keeping the wind aft, muttering to himself nervously as he waited for some report from forward.

HIGH words among the sailors carried to him. The men at the pumps stopped pumping, coming to blows over some indistinguishable argument. A scuffling came from the hatch, a shout, a reddish burst of smoke, a ripping, salty deep water oath that was abruptly cut off in the middle; then Tranter burst forth on deck and shouted excitedly:

"She's beyond saving. Better leave her, Captain."

The fight still raged around the pump. Other men surged forward at the mate's appearance. Then old Socky appeared, singed and half suffocated, his black face streaming sweat in the light of the deck lanterns. He leaped to the deck, faced aft and bellowed—

"Don' yo' believe—" Socky's cry was cut off just as that last ripping, salty deep water oath had been; Socky pitched forward on his face; Mulligan almost fell over him with a curse.

"What is the matter?" cried the skipper impatiently. "Mr. Tranter, send a man to the wheel, and let me see what—"

Tranter ran aft, and half the crew were at his heels.

"The cook was overcome by coffee fumes, sir," the mate reported. "The fire is too fierce to be stopped. The second mate is knocked out, and Chips fell down a hole. Better order the boats out."

"I don't believe it!" shouted the skipper in frenzy. "The ship can be saved! You've left that hatch off. Here, you, take the wheel." Ord beckoned to Mulligan, in the forefront of the mate's crowd.

"Aw, take a runnin' jump at yerself. We ain't stayin' on no burnin' ship to roast. C'mon, boys. Take the boats," retorted Mulligan, and turned away to lead the rest.

With astonishing speed the old skipper jumped at him, delivered a round arm swing with all the force of old bucko days, and Mulligan hit the deck like a falling log.

The men backed in amazement. Even Tranter looked less assured. But the fire roared, the smoke blotted out the moonlight. One of the oldest hands stepped forward, his weather beaten face dark with pity.

"Cap'n," he said respectfully, "th' foscle's red hot, an' th' decks afire underneath. Most of us is with you, sir; but we got families, and—"

"You'll see your families all right if you stand to your duty like sailormen," the skipper broke in. "I'll shoot the man that touches a boat before I give the order. Follow me, men. We'll see if the ship's doomed."

"Aw, t' hell wid the old stiff! Take the boats an' leave him!" snarled Mulligan, rising woozily.

Tranter watched Captain Ord until he vanished in the smoke about the fore hatch. Red tongues licked upward through the murk; a flickering flame attached itself to the foot of the big fore course.

"Haul up the foresail!" yelled the skipper. "Get these hatches on! Lay for'ard, men! Aft there! Keep her before the wind."

The old hands obeyed, reluctantly. The blocks squealed as the big courses were hauled up to clew garnets and buntlines. Tranter saw the flickering flame crushed from the foot of the foresail by the folds of heavy canvas; saw half the men disappear into the smoke after the skipper; then he turned to Mulligan.

"The boats! Get a move on. Grub and water."

Forward, the skipper got the pumps working again. Then he stationed men at the hatches, and had a corner raised cautiously while he forced his ample bulk painfully through. On the mate's own report, two men were down there. Left there to burn. He was anxious about his old cook; but Socky at least was out on deck, whatever might be the matter with him. The hold seemed to be ablaze sheer across from wing to wing. The burning coffee was suffocating. But there was another, denser reek that puzzled the skipper.

"Light along that hose," he called up.

The smoke made him cough. Men hauled the dripping hose along, shamed into obedience. The man who had ventured to speak of families was the man nearest the hatch.

"Light 'er along, mates!" he bawled. "Here. One o' you take my place. Th' Old Man's stiflin' in the smoke."

Men pumped, shifting from one foot to the other on the hot deck. Steam rose and played about them, making them look in the misty moonlight like deformed dwarfs in a fog. And they sang, those simple, rough, faithful men of the open sea. They sang as they pumped:

"Lowlands, lowlands, away my John!
O my old mother she wrote to me,
For my dollar and half a day.
She wrote to me to come home from sea,
Lowlands, lowlands, away my John!"

TRANTER entered the chart room, and pored over the chart. It required little adjustment to carry the reckoning from noon up to the moment; then he applied the result of his sounding. With a pencil he ticked off the mark which coincided with both depth and position.

"Less than a hundred miles," he muttered.

Then with the chart and parallel rulers, dividers and pencil he went to the nearest boat. As if they had been drilled for just this emergency, Mulligan and the men with him stored and watered two boats and swung them outboard. They took the two outer boats on the gallows, which lay under davits. The two remaining boats had not been overboard in years. They were painted fast to the chocks by numberless coats of paint; they were heaped full of disused ropes and gear; the value of them as lifeboats had long since been negative.

"All ready?" Tranter asked.

He keenly scanned the faces of the men. There was one face there which belonged to the old crew. Upon that face an expression of doubt still lingered.

"Ain't there no chance at all to save th' Old Man's ship, sir?" the man ventured. "It's everything he's got. It ain't insured, neither. P'raps if we was to keep on pumpin'—funny how th' fire—"

"My lad, in half an hour this ship will be ablaze from end to end," returned Tranter, forcing a tone of patience. "I was down the hold. I saw it was hopeless. Chips and the second mate both passed

out trying. There is no chance for the ship; there is for our lives. Which do you want? You go for'ard and tell your mates the boats are leaving. They'll come. The Old Man'll come too, unless he's gone batty with the heat. Shake a leg, now. No time to waste chewin' the rag."

The sailor ran forward. His bare feet as he ran warned him that the fire must be of a fierceness not to be denied. The decks were scorching hot, and grew hotter as he ran forward. Men at the hatch grabbed him, uttering words indistinguishable from choking coughs, pointing below into the inferno of the hold. In an instant he was coughing too, strangling in the fearful reek. Men staggered away from the hatch. The pump had stopped again.

Tranter watched keenly. The moment the doubting sailor had vanished from view, he motioned to Mulligan. The nearer they got to embarking, the more nervous the men became. When all were in the boats, a man laughed hysterically, and Tranter cursed him. Mulligan alone appeared to retain all his faculties. He slashed through the falls with his sheath knife, and the boat he was in passed silently astern as the ship sailed on. The other boat followed, and soon the two laden craft dwindled into spiderlike specks upon the moonlit waters, with the burning *Perseus* behind them. Toward the coast they steered, with sails and oars.

"SOMEPIN shorely hit me a poke on ma haid!" groaned old Socky, sitting up and feeling his kinky pate.

He started coughing. He was seated in a most uncomfortably warm place. He could see nothing but smoke, hear nothing but the coughing of distressed men and the roaring of flames. Realization came swiftly to him.

"When I git ma hands on that Mulligan!" he exclaimed, and stumbled gropingly toward the hatch where half stifled men pulled and hauled at something just below the coaming. The negro lent a hand, and in a little while the second mate was dragged out on deck, inert, limp.

"Bear a hand, lads, here's another," gasped the skipper's voice in the blazing hold.

Another heroic moment, and Chips came up, his clothes smoldering. He, too, lay like a bit of rope in the men's hands. Socky's sharp ears caught a groan amid the reek; in a flash he had slipped below and caught the skipper's sleeve.

"Heah!" he bawled. "Cap'n's c'lapsed. Gimme a aind o' rope. Dawggone 'f he ain't as loggy es a daid whale!"

It took longer to raise the skipper's unconscious body. Then old Socky hoisted himself out, rubbed some burning ends from his kinky hair, and clapped the hatches on over the fire. As if he knew the ship was without command, the negro gave orders, and the men who heard obeyed, for they knew his worth as a seaman. While they dragged all who lay stupefied or otherwise hurt along to the comparative coolness of the after deck, Socky ran to the wheel, put the ship on her course dead before the wind, and lashed the helm. Then he saw the dangling davit tackles, and his eyes popped. Sweeping his gaze over the sea, he saw the tiny, dwindling specks of the boats.

"Heah!" his lusty old voice roared out. "Come see, yo' sailormen. Ain' I said Tranter was trash? Look at 'em go. My golly, they done lef' us to burn up!"

Men rushed to the remaining boats, hurling out the litter in them. Sheer power of fear drove them to efforts far beyond their normal strength. They wrenched the boats from their paint glued chocks, lifted them and carried them bodily over to the davits. They cursed at the cut tackles, trying to hurl the boats over the side by main strength. Socky had gone to his captain, left half way up the ladder, and rolled him, slapped him, patted his face and crooned to him, trying to make his eyes open to the general peril. He heard a boat crash into the sea, heard men curse anew.

"Ma Lawd!" he yelled, running toward the gallows. "Ma gracious Lawd! What

yo' all doin'? Dat's one boat yo' smashed; I kin tell by th' sound. Leave the other, fo' the Lawd's own sake, an' follah th' ordahs. By gracious, he ain't daid yet. No, suh."

The men stared stupidly at the boat's débris floating placidly astern. The years, the dry years, had robbed the planks of their strength. The keel and ribs were dry rotted. The good old ship sailed on, her fore part a roaring hell, her decks so hot that the pitch no longer bubbled, but boiled into bladders and then baked into shells of black cinder.

A cloud of black smoke blew over the sea before her. Far out on the quarter two specks, like spiders, foul spiders, had merged into the sealine.

At last old Socky saw his master's eyes flicker and open. He stuttered:

"Cap'n! Yo' ain't daid, are yo'? Say yo' ain't daid! By golly, yo' got to save us or else de debbil shorely got us by the short haihs! Yes, suh!"

Crooning as to a child, the faithful old negro told the skipper what had happened.

"I stahted to tell yo' befo', but that Mulligan done fetch me a poke on to ma haid wid a top maul an' I jus' dozed off fo' a minute, Cap'n. When I woke up, they was gone."

Captain Ord stumbled to his feet, bewildered. There was his beloved old ship, burning like a furnace. Almost in sight of port, too. His mate had deserted him. So had every one of the new men who had signed on with the mate for the voyage. The rest of the crew stood uneasily by the sole remaining boat.

"I can't believe it," he muttered. He turned toward the chart room. "A man couldn't be such a dog as to set the *Perseus* afire. If he did, he wouldn't leave men to burn. I won't believe it, not even of a Tranter."

"Yes, suh," said Socky at his elbow. "I see the oil cans an' shavings what hadn't caught light. I said so. 'Twas what Mulligan socked me on the haid fo'. Th' second mate see it, too. Misto Tranter sock him on the haid wid a blackjack. Oh, I tell yo'—"

Captain Ord was inside the chart room. The chart was gone. So were the rulers and dividers. He opened the log, took out the previous noon position, and mentally carried it up to date. Then he ran to the sounding machine. The tube was shattered on the deck. Back to the chart room he went, to find the spare tubes smashed in the drawer. Everything seemed fiendishly arranged to cause delay.

"Cain't we mend the other boat, Cap'n?" suggested Socky.

But something had happened to the skipper. He had seen a devilish plot to send him and his beloved old ship to one common, horrible burial. Whether Nicholas Tranter had backed the plot or not he cared little now. He was supposed to be doomed, his ship was supposed to be doomed. The house of Ord was to be wiped out, along with the clipper that had borne its house flag so long and so well. And that valuable cargo which was to reinstate him was doomed along with the rest.

"She can't go. I'll carry her in!" he exclaimed.

Old Socky stared after him as he went to the break of the poop and bade the men leave the boat and muster aft. They came sullenly.

"Men," the skipper addressed them, "I have never yet given you an order which I did not believe could be carried out. I never gave you an order which you failed to carry out. I ask you to stand by me now and save the ship. I won't believe she can't be saved. She was set afire and you were left to die. I refuse to die that way. If you refuse to die like rats, you will live to die like men.

"I want volunteers to go down and open the valve in the flooding cistern. Two can do it. I'd go myself but I'm too fat. Two men can go to work and put that last boat in seaworthy shape, in case we must abandon ship. The rest of you will spell each other on the main pumps whenever the water rises above safety level in the holds. We can save her, lads. Her decks still hold; she has lost no spars. Fill her and put out the fire, and I'll hold

her head toward the coast before this fair breeze.

"I shan't ask you if you will. I know you will. Socky, you old singed black sheep, give all hands a tot of Jamaica, and let 'em get to work."

THE SHIP sailed heavily with the burden of water in her. Anxiously the skipper watched her. Twice the deep sea lead was cast. The ship was on soundings the second time, coast soundings within the hundred fathom line. But the fire was still blazing; the water had not reached it thoroughly.

The pumps clanked wearily. The men had sung a chantey at first. Toward morning they worked in sullen, dogged silence. Then the water crept up to the fiercest part of the fire. The skipper had dared much, letting the ship come nigh the sinking point in one last challenge to the blaze. The fore hatch blew up in a volcano of steam, and the foremast rocked ominously. Captain Ord watched the mast. He guessed that the heel had been burned almost through. Only the rigging held it. He had plotted his position on a fresh chart. There was still a considerable distance to travel before the coast offered refuge. There were still a few miles to sail before the ship could sink in a depth which might possibly permit the raising of her.

"Come on, Socky!" he urged. "Let you and me shake 'em up with a song. We can take her home, Socky. Sure we can."

Together those two old sea dogs, the white and the black, hove the pump brakes up and down. Sweat poured from them. The decks peeled the skin from their feet.

"Oh, don't you hear the Old Man say:
'Goodby, fare you well, goodby, fare you well!
We're homeward bound this very day;
Goodby, my lads, we're homeward bound!'"

One by one men crept forward and lent a hand. But it was a forlorn hope. When the ship was in thirty fathoms of water, the pumps no longer held the water down. The smoke and steam from the hatch swept ahead of them so that nothing could be seen of the shoreward sea or sky.

"Get the boat in the water," the skipper said with a choke in his voice.

The foremast fell ten minutes later. Captain Ord hove the hand lead.

"Twenty fathom," he muttered.

The boat was towing alongside. The ship no longer steered before the wind with the foremast gone. The men stood by the davits.

"Time to leave her, lads," quavered the Old Man.

One by one they slid down the falls, silent, awed by his expression. Old Socky hung back until only the skipper remained. The tears streamed down his smoke grimed, scorched black face. Reverently Socky knelt on the deck, and laid his cracked lips to the hot planks. Then he swarmed down into the boat, and shoved away the man waiting to receive the skipper.

"Nos, suh! That's ma own special duty!" he said, and laid his soiled white jacket for the Old Man to sit upon.

IT WAS a week later. For six days Doris had nursed her father through moods of black despondency which had come upon him after landing his men at night fifty miles down the coast. Widow Owens had almost burst with the secret of sheltering in her little house a boatload of shipwrecked sailors, and forbidden to say one word about them outside. Old Socky assumed the duties of cook and housekeeper, so the worthy widow had nothing to do but flutter about in a frenzy of kindly futility. News from the town was to the effect that Jake Tranter and his crew of deserters were heroes, rated on their own uncontested story of a gallant fight against fire and leak which had taken sad toll of the *Perseus's* company. Captain Ord first began to smile when Doris brought a bit of special news home to him. Her young diver had undertaken to examine the sunken *Perseus.*

She brought news of him. He had found the ship, and a report would be in the captain's hands that night.

"You shouldn't let Jake Tranter get away with those lies!" Doris protested vehemently. Her father had refused to make his own story public yet.

"Time enough," he would say. "Who is going to believe me now? Didn't we have a boat? Didn't we all get ashore? Only Socky knows the truth. Who will take his word against Tranter's? Let me be, Doris. Let me think. All seems lost just now. We were not insured. Tranter holds my note. He has seen me ruined, as he wanted to. If the ship can be raised, where will I get money to refit her? All the good she will do me is to fly Tranter's flag before my eyes as she goes out. No. Just as soon as young Owens sends in his report, I shall go to Tranter and put as good a face as I can on the situation."

That evening Mrs. Owens ran into the house frothing with indignation.

"My lands!" she cried. "They say as honesty's the best o' policy! And here's that old rascal Tranter made a fortune out o' the *Perseus* a-burnin' up. A fortune, Captain Ord! That ore was insured for a hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Think of it!"

"Tranter," echoed the skipper blankly. "What had Tranter to do with that ore?"

"They say his agent shipped it to his agent here, and he done it out o' good will to you, not wanting to let you know he was giving you such a good freight."

The old lady rambled along, full of the gossip. Old Socky stood behind the skipper's chair, and his big black eyes glistened in sympathy with his master's look of puzzlement. Neither could believe such a motive had actuated Tranter. If it were true, then the old shipowner had either been gravely misjudged, or he had turned over a new page. Doris looked puzzled, too. She tried to reconcile the story with her experiences with the Tranters, old and young.

"I believe he'll win a fortune out of our loss," she said. "But the other part of the story—" She left the sentence unfinished to run to the door.

Her eager young ears had caught the sound of a familiar step. She opened the door and brought in young Owens, all bronzed and smiling, shy too, as became a young man of decent modesty on being first presented to his sweetheart's parent as a future son-in-law. Captain Ord's wise old eyes swept the young man once, and the appraisal was done. Satisfaction was the unspoken verdict. But everybody in the room waited anxiously for another verdict. The skipper dared not ask of the ship. The diver sensed the tension and blurted out his report baldly and rapidly, permitting no exclamation of incredulity or amazement to halt him.

"The ship can be raised," he said. "Her fore part is gutted, but she is still sound in frame and planking. Deck mostly untouched. Coffee is ruined, of course, but—" he hesitated for a breath, his own feelings hindering speech. "I heard as I came along, that old Tranter will clean up a fortune out of the insurance."

"Aye, my lad, and there is no money to put into the old *Perseus*," the skipper put in gloomily. "It's the old story over again. I never would believe it. But it looks as if it's true. Square rigged'll get you to loo'ard, all right, but it's the close hauled sharp as gets t' windward! I suppose it's life. It's rotten, though. I allus sailed square rigged. Both in ships and my conduct, lad. Here I be, way down to loo'ard, and—"

"Hold on, dad!" cried Doris, clapping an important hand over her parent's mouth. "Don't you see he hasn't done yet?"

The young diver went on, his face lighted up with an immense gratification:

"The coffee is ruined. But the ore, the hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth of cargo that is to make Nick Tranter's fortune, is nothing but bags of dirt."

"Glory halleluiah!" howled old Socky, leaping high in the air and coming down with a terrific spat of his bare feet on the oilcloth floor. "Dawggone if I ain't tol' you so, Cap'n! You say I break ma teeth

on dey onions what I grow in that kind of dirt. How you say it now, hey?"

In his exuberance, he whacked the skipper on the back, and kissed Owens, then rushed into the kitchen and hugged all hands. Gradually a smile crossed the skipper's face as the full significance of the news struck him. People would believe his story now. Tranter's name would stink. Both, father and son, two of a kind, would be driven out of the community by sheer weight of public opinion. Of course, it did not help him very much, the Tranters coming to grief. He still owed old Tranter that money. There would still be no money to raise and refit the old *Perseus*. But the *Perseus* at least would have gone to her ocean resting place with no smirch on her fair name. And Doris was secure in her future with young Owens. That was sure. It needed no more than a glance for an old sailorman to see that.

The only cloud on the horizon was that debt to Tranter. How that would be squared he had no notion just then. But he saw no reason why he should ask others to share his gloom. His loyal crew had remained in the house nearly a week in obedience to his wish. He did not want them to clash with the other part of the crew until the report came in from the diver. Now they could go. He sent them out for a stroll with ten dollars apiece on account of wages due, and his blessing.

There was a fight that night. Old Socky met Mulligan. It was a notable combat. At the hospital next day they said that Mulligan was taking nourishment out of the spout of a teapot.

"Didn't he hurt you, Socky?" asked Doris, renewing the plaster on the cook's nose.

"Hurt me, missy? Lawd bless you! He couldn't hurt me when he socked me on the haid with a top maul. He only had a bottle last night. Hurt me? Huh!"

A week passed again, and there was more news in the house of Ord. A letter came from the insurers of the *Perseus's* cargo. It praised Captain Ord for his courage and seamanship in carrying his ship into soundings, and thanked him for saving them a large loss over fraudulent cargo. They enclosed a check, and wished to remain, etc. . . .

The skipper read it at the door, while the mail carrier chatted with old Socky. The check was for an amount that made the old skipper stare. It would take care of all his money troubles.

"See the Tranters left this morning," said the postman. "Hear they booked for Rooshia."

Captain Ord walked into the house as in a dream. Old Socky capered around the house to the kitchen door, leaving the gossipy postman standing in disgusted isolation. From the rear of the house rolled forth a throaty African voice lifted in triumphant song:

"Ho, the debbil an' me we cain't agree,
Glory halleluiah!
Fo' I hates him an' he hates me,
Glory halleluiah!

Sing halleluiah, shout halleluiah, glory halleluiah!
I hates him an' he hates me, glory halleluiah!"

LEE CHRISTMAS *and a* NEWCOME

By

EUGENE CUNNINGHAM

LEE CHRISTMAS loved to tell of a certain tenderfoot who came to Honduras and much annoyed the American residents of Tegucigalpa with his stories of where he had been and what he had done. Particularly, he was a mighty hunter, this newcome. He had guns and rods and skinning knives and hunting suits and fishing suits, until—as Lee remarked meditatively—hell just wouldn't have it!

He cultivated Lee, who was at the time head of the Honduras National Police. Finally he expressed a desire to visit Lee's coconut *finca*, a few miles up country. So Lee sent him with a note to the *majordomo* of the plantation and the newcome departed, arrayed as for an expedition into darkest Africa.

The *majordomo* showed him over the plantation and was high hatted for his pains. With growing disgust, he watched the newcome searching for dangerous carnivorae and, failing to find jaguar or panther, blaze away with a heavy sporting rifle at the swarming *olingas*—the squat black baboons that chattered in the palms. After many a miss, a luckless *olinga* hurtled from a palm top and with it strapped behind his saddle and the disgusted *majordomo* trailing, the newcome hastened back to Tegucigalpa to display his bag.

Lee Christmas came sauntering out of police headquarters, huge, red faced, white haired, expressionless. With round, unwinking blue eyes he regarded the *majordomo* and the newcome, who was proudly waving the shattered baboon.

"I got one of the pests for you, General!" cried the newcome. "There were hundreds of 'em in your trees. Would have got more, only the—the sun was in my eyes."

"*Lizzie!*" cried Lee tragically, clapping a great hand over his eyes. "Oh, *mi buen dios!* He's murdered poor Lizzie!"

"*Lizzie?*" repeated the newcome, wide eyed, open mouthed.

"Lizzie!" roared Lee. "The pride of the *finca!* The chief instructor! Worth her weight in gold, to say nothing of the sentimental attachment! We worked five years to teach her to pick coconuts; she always picked twelve, fifteen thousand a season. She was teaching all the others. And now—you've murdered her! Oh, where's my gun? *Where's* my gun?"

He slapped his hip, but found it weaponless—his Lugers being in their accustomed shoulder holsters hidden beneath his linen coat. He rushed back into headquarters, bellowing at all and sundry to give him a gun, at least one gun, with which to slay a murdering newcome who had lived too long.

The *majordomo* withdrew hastily—around the building, where he fell down and embraced a corral post and made strange giggling noises. The newcome lay flat upon his mule's neck and exhorted him to emigrate. He reached the hotel in a mule record for the distance and bolted himself in his room. For two days—until the steamer came to San Corenzo—he ate his meals there. He would not go down to the steamer until the stony faced American Consul, with a solemn array of clerks, came to escort him clear to the coast.

Doubtless, where he lives somewhere in the *olinga*-less regions of these United States, he has taught his children that there isn't any Santa Claus and has forbidden them to celebrate Christmas Day.

THE OBLITERATED BUDDHA

A Story of Shanghai and a Clever Game of Oriental Wits

By JAMES W. BENNETT *and* SOONG KWEN-LING

YUAN KUO-FAN was the newly appointed manager of one of the most powerful "people's banks" in Shanghai, the Cheng Chong pawnshop. His was a case of promotion from chief clerk, after many years in the firm's employ. Aged forty, gray haired, firm lipped but usually smiling, he was reputed to be a man of exceptional shrewdness. Until the time of his promotion, however, he had had little opportunity to display his business acumen.

Yuan's crisp manner and his judicial voice those first weeks of his managership were but the thinnest of masks. Hourly he was troubled by all the sensations of a man who must save his neck by crossing

a chasm on slippery tree trunks that have been felled to make a bridge.

It was one thing, for example, to bring a package of rubies to another man and ask him—

"How much, in your judgment, dare we loan on each of these?"

On the other hand, it was quite a different thing to be the individual who must state—

"Give the customer twelve hundred dollars on the whole of them."

A month passed and he began to breathe easier. Then, one cold morning in the middle of winter, he was at work in his private office when a clerk came and touched his elbow.

"Something I can not handle, Mr. Yuan."

Yuan nodded, left his office and crossed the main room of the shop with its piled merchandise, its dim lights, its fretted, lacquered woodwork. At the counter a customer saluted him with a nod and a smile. Yuan accorded the man his usual quick scrutiny.

The applicant gave the impression of being a gentleman. His outer robe was of heavily brocaded satin, lined with Chinese sable. His gauntlets, which he had removed, were of fine soft leather, also lined with fur. But it was not alone in his outward appearance that he gave the stamp of gentility. The eyes were clear gazed, honest and sparkling. The hands were supple, long fingered, patrician. And the smile with which he had greeted the manager displayed even white teeth through the parting of thin but well formed lips.

"What is your wish?" asked Yuan.

"My name is Tseng," he replied obliquely. "I have something here." He took from his robe a small leather box. "It is something I desire to—to—" He stopped short, apparently with the usual embarrassment of a man having to confess straitened circumstances.

"To pawn, eh?" Yuan finished for him.

The manager took up the case; it was of shagreen, handsomely embossed with gold. He opened it. Then, with an astonished, quick indrawing of breath, he lifted out the object that lay within. As he did so, Tseng quickly spread out both hands beneath Yuan's.

"Sorry," Tseng explained, "but I don't want to run any risk of its being broken —accidentally dropped."

Yuan nodded and began to scrutinize it. A semi-precious stone—wonderful Chinese onyx—had been exquisitely cut in the figure of a Buddha. The tiny statue was only an inch in height. It was designed sitting, with the knees tucked under the feet, after the pattern of all Contemplative Buddhas. The hands, infinitely small, were clasped, palm to palm, in front of the breast. The workmanship was marvelous. Even the texture of the robe was delicately limned. As for the face, its mouth and nostrils seemed almost to flutter with gentle inhalations of breath. The cheeks were rose tinged, the half closed eyes suavely tranquil—animate.

Gently Yuan laid the image of Gautama back into its leather case. The visible anxiety of Tseng was relieved; the tension of his outspread fingers relaxed. He asked haltingly—

"Is the—Buddha—pawnable?"

"Yes."

"How much can you allow me?"

Yuan hesitated. Here was one of his hourly problems. But, before he could answer, Tseng went on hurriedly:

"I shall only deposit it here for a couple of days. Yes—for three or four at the longest. It—it's—a financial stringency—of an unexpected nature that compels me to come here. But I trust—" he lifted his head—"that you know the value of the piece."

Again the manager hesitated.

"Y-yes," he answered.

"My father bought this," Tseng asserted, "of a drunken German soldier in Peking during the Boxer uprising."

At this a light broke upon Yuan.

"It might be one of the eight figures from the Pearl Pagoda that was lost during the ransacking of the city—"

"Exactly!" interrupted Tseng. "That is *just* what it is! But I am in a hurry. I would like to discuss it longer with you, but—" He shrugged and smiled apologetically as if to atone for the brusk speech. "Well, will you give me on it—fifty thousand dollars?"

Yuan gazed at the wooden beads of the abacus beside him on the counter. Here was this customer, owner of a treasure of art, the value of which the manager was supposed to know—asking what seemed a routine question. Yuan felt a sudden surge of pride. He decided that he would not confess his ignorance; he would lose this bit of business instead. Deliberately he said to Tseng:

"You will have to apply elsewhere. I am afraid we can allow you only thirty thousand on it."

"Why—why, it would probably bring, at a forced sale, two hundred thousand!"

But Yuan's decision was made, and he shook his head.

Tseng heaved a deep sigh. Reluctantly he closed the shagreen case. With meticulous care he tucked it away in the recesses of his fur gown. He bowed to Yuan, turned about and trudged out of the building. His steps were slow and heavy as if the weight of his precious burden bore him down.

AS YUAN looked after Tseng, a decided feeling of sympathy for the man began to war with the decision that had just been made. He knew the tremendous "heart" value that his fellow countrymen put upon such treasures, and he pitied Tseng the ill fortune that forced him to part with it.

This passed through Yuan's mind before the other had reached the quilted storm door at the entrance. He was tempted to call Tseng back—but did not.

The manager's curiosity was definitely aroused, however. He left the shop almost immediately and went down the lane to the home of an old friend, a lapidary of some note. Minutely Yuan described the Buddha to the expert. The latter replied that it was indubitably one of the precious eight. He further stated that the value depended upon the whim of a collector, but, even so, its worth was considerably more than a hundred thousand dollars.

As Yuan walked slowly back to Cheng Chong's, he pondered over this piece of intelligence. It did not add to his peace of mind. He had turned down a customer's demand which was not exorbitant. Also, he had cost the firm a pretty loan that would have looked well on the books.

That evening, after Cheng Chong's had closed, Yuan made further inquiry, going this time to the head man of the jewel merchant's guild. There he received even more definite confirmation as to the value of the image. The single block of stone from which the figures had been cut had been discovered in the Han period, two thousand years before. The carving had been done by order of the Manchu emperor, Ch'ien Lung. The image, with its seven brethren, was originally housed in a miniature pagoda of silver, incrusted with pearls. Treasured in the Summer Palace, it had been stolen when the imperial residences were looted by foreign soldiery. Seven of the tiny figures were known to be in a Berlin museum. The eighth, traded by a soldier for a cheap but flashy bit of cloisonné, had apparently disappeared from the face of the earth. It was thought to be in Chinese hands, declared the guild master. There had been a rumor current, only this season, to that effect.

Yuan thanked his informant and gave a plausibly evasive answer when the other wished to know why he asked. On the way back to his home, which adjoined Cheng Chong's, the manager cursed himself softly for his stupidity. Yet, there was a thrill of excitement, too, in the thought that he had been privileged to see and examine that eighth Buddha.

The next afternoon, Yuan was again called from his desk.

"Sorry to disturb you a second time," came a friendly voice across the counter. It was Tseng. He carefully reached into his robe and drew forth the now familiar shagreen case. "I really am sorry to trouble you," he repeated.

"Oh, that's quite all right," Yuan replied, trying to avoid a display of his elation. "Quite."

His hand strayed out. He opened the box and made another examination of the Buddha. What a bit of sheer loveliness it was! Carefully he laid it back.

In the meantime, Tseng was pulling from his waistband belt a package and a small silken bag.

"I can't tide over my present need with less than fifty thousand dollars. I have brought these extra things in the hope that you would consider them as making up the balance."

The silk bag contained some twenty rings, all more or less worthless. The package of oiled paper displayed a necklace of Ceylon pearls worth not more than eight or nine hundred dollars. And this to offset a deficit of twenty thousand dollars. But now Yuan knew that there was no need of hesitation; he was fully aware of the value of the figurine.

"These will do nicely," he told Tseng.

The other sighed sharply. There was a moment of silence, then he turned, gazed out the window and remarked to Yuan—

"It's getting colder, eh?"

Tseng's right hand dropped carelessly over the leather case. With his left hand he began gently chafing the back of the right, as if to arouse the circulation of blood. Casually he pulled down the long sleeve of his furlined robe—to warm and protect that gloveless right hand. Then, as if none of this procedure had been able to warm it, thrust the hand for a moment in the fur of the robe's lining.

During this time Yuan had been noting down the various rings and the necklace on a pawn ticket. That done, he reached out his hand for the box with the Buddha.

As Tseng handed the leather box over, his eyes were wistfully sad. There was a pathetic droop about the corners of his mouth. Yuan did not again open the box; it seemed cruel and unnecessary to cause the man further pain by prolonging the transaction.

Yuan completed the ticket and went back to his office where the money and valuables were kept. He placed the rings, the necklace, and the shagreen box in a special drawer. From the cash compartment he counted out the fifty thousand. It practically wiped out a week's surplus. For an instant, he felt his usual qualm, but now he laughed it away. He knew exactly what values were in this case.

Tseng examined the pawn ticket in a cursory manner and picked up the money without counting it. He gave a curt bow and walked swiftly away. For a moment Yuan was puzzled by the change in the man from the other's almost suppliant attitude of a few moments before. He was forced, however, to forget his puzzlement immediately, over the problem of another customer who had been waiting to see him.

THAT night, as the clock struck the hour of evening rice, Yuan unlocked the safe and took out the leather case with the Buddha. He slipped it immediately, without opening it, into his jacket pocket. He intended showing it to his chief clerk who had been away that day, but who was to dine with him that evening.

After Yuan and his subordinate had finished eating—and the coolie was going through the operation of constantly filling, refilling, and lighting their water pipes—the manager drew out the leather case.

"I have something here to show you," he began. "Something unbelievably—" Then he stopped and stared at the box he had just opened. He gave a choking sound.

A tiny figure smiled tranquilly—impudently—up at him. It was a Bud-

dha, done in onyx—but what a difference. Gone was the superb craftsmanship of that patient worker in the days of Ch'ien Lung! Gone was the luminous transparency. Gone was the subtle impression of breathing life. Yuan rubbed his eyes madly. No, he was not mistaken. It was a clever piece of work, but a copy, a patent counterfeit.

Yuan's services at Cheng Chong's for the past years seemed to him turning out but the tissue of dreams. Now, before his eyes, he could watch his reputation —the result of month upon month of labor there—slowly dissolving. Ruin stared him squarely in the face . . .

As he sat at his desk that night, the pattering of the wooden beads of a late working clerk's abacus seemed to count away all future hope.

The man Tseng would never come back to redeem his pledge, Yuan well knew. The substitution had been made before the manager's eyes. Things had been even simpler for Tseng—Yuan reflected bitterly—than the man had probably planned, since the counterfeit itself was of considerable value. Tseng had evidently counted upon the possibility of the manager's opening the box before placing it in the safe. Nevertheless, in the dimmer light at the back of the shop, Yuan would be fooled by the substituted figure.

Yuan made a calculation of his savings, furniture, scrolls and porcelains, and then wrote a conveyance deeding them all to Cheng Chong. For his probable successor he balanced the books and put them in order—not a great task, since the system employed was simple. That finished, he wrote a note to the president of the board of directors. With a brief explanation, he tendered his resignation.

The answering chit came immediately. The president wrote that he would call a meeting of the board in the morning to discuss the case. No mention was made of the resignation, but the tone of the note was cold.

That night Yuan did not sleep, in fact, did not go to bed. He paced the floor and thought of a hundred useless schemes to regain the money. Tseng, he argued, was too clever a thief to be caught by the police. That simple course could not be followed. There was only one general direction to be pursued: To weave a path of trickery as winding and sinuous as Tseng's had been. But the question was *how* to do this?

At last, as if in answer to all the mental travail, a nebulous scheme began to take form and color. It was so wild, so sheerly improbable, that at first Yuan laughed it away. It returned and lingered. At last, in sheer desperation, he decided to attempt it . . .

AT THE directors' meeting the next morning Yuan told his story. He made no attempt to minimize his criminal lack of caution. They spoke little in censure of him, but were anxious to get down to the business of recovery.

Their first suggestion was the police. But Yuan explained to them that even if they were to lay hands upon the man, it would be Tseng's word against the manager's. For there had been no witnesses to the transaction. It would be difficult to convince a magistrate that Yuan had loaned fifty thousand dollars on an object which he had not examined with greater care. The judge might even conclude that Yuan had made the forgery in an attempt to embezzle the funds of the firm; or that some clerk with access to the safe had committed the act.

The directors saw the force of this argument. They shrugged their shoulders and looked at Yuan helplessly.

That was the moment he chose to propound his scheme. They listened in a silence that lingered after he had finished—a silence that grew ominous. At last it was broken by a laugh from the president of the board. He spoke:

"Well, Yuan, your plan is on a parity with this entire strange business. You placed yourself in this predicament; I think we should give you a chance to extricate yourself."

Then turning to the board—

"Gentlemen, is that also your pleasure?"

After a moment of hesitation the others nodded in agreement, and the president concluded—

"Now, Yuan, what do you wish us to do to further your scheme?"

"Discredit me!" the manager answered quickly. "Allow the impression to get out that you have completely repudiated me. That I have resigned—which I most certainly shall do, if my plan fails."

The president of the board tore up the deed Yuan had made out and handed the ribboned paper back to him with a smile. When the manager departed, each director in turn wished him luck.

But, back of it all, he knew he was on trial with them.

In accordance with his scheme, from that moment Yuan appeared before the world a ruined man. The clerks—and one could never be sure where a leak might spring—saw him close his desk and hand over the department to his chief clerk. He took with him the counterfeit Buddha.

Once away from the office he went immediately to the home of his friend, the lapidary, and showed him the image. The expert recognized it at once as an imitation.

"Can you make me a passable copy of this?" Yuan demanded.

The other chuckled.

"A counterfeit of a counterfeit?"

"Yes!"

"When must you have it?"

"By tomorrow afternoon. Not later!"

The expert threw up his hands.

"Of course my workman can do you a figurine by that time. But it will be crude—incomparably crude."

"Would it fool a person viewing it from a distance of—say—three or four feet?"

The lapidary hesitated. "Yes—yes, I think we could fashion one that would answer."

"Make me the image, then. And say *nothing* about my being the person who is ordering it. Swear to secrecy the workman who fashions it."

The expert was now gazing at Yuan in astonishment.

"Just as soon as I can," the latter answered, "I shall tell you all about it. Now I can not, beyond the fact—" Yuan swallowed hard and his hands suddenly clenched—"that it is practically a life and death matter to me!"

THE NEXT step in Yuan's scheme was more complicated. In response to the manager's invitation, there gathered at the Flowering Wisteria Restaurant, the next evening, some forty men. They were Yuan's colleagues, managers and sub-managers of Shanghai's largest pawnshops.

Also, there were present several police reporters for local vernacular papers. These were men to whom Yuan, at one time or another, had given stories of attempts to place stolen goods with Cheng Chong's. This evening he promised them "something unusual".

The dinner began. Yuan was so excited that he could scarcely eat. He kept reaching into his pockets. The right hand pocket inside his silk jacket contained the counterfeit Buddha that had brought him to grief. The left pocket held—as the lapidary had called it—"the counterfeit of a counterfeit".

The expert had been as good as his word. He had tricked Yuan out with a small, glass figure painted with graining to represent onyx. A fragile trinket it was, worth little more than the day's labor of the workman who had made it.

Course after course was brought, eaten of and carried away. At last the long meal drew to a close. Yuan pulled from his pocket the onyx Buddha in its shagreen case. Without making any comment, he passed it about the table.

The managers looked up in surprise. The reporters were gazing at Yuan alertly. The tiny statue made the rounds of the tables and was returned to Yuan. With it again in his possession he rose.

His heart was pounding painfully at the moment, but his voice was steady enough.

"Gentlemen," he began, "my purpose in bringing you here tonight is to tell you of a colossal blunder that I have committed; to announce to you my retirement from our profession, one of the oldest, and certainly one of the most honorable. Of my resignation you have possibly heard rumors already. And now, you have each seen this Buddha—" Yuan held up the image. "It's value is two—possibly three—hundred dollars. This little figure has brought about the loss to my firm of fifty thousand dollars."

"Ey-ah!" they muttered sympathetically.

"Yet," Yuan continued, "it is not this Buddha that alone must bear the blame. The real fault lay in my overconfidence and in my trustfulness. I detected no guile in the man who pawned it. It was his apparent sorrow at parting with the thing that kept me from making a final examination as I took it from his hands. This tiny statue here is but a forgery of the original, one of the eight famous onyx Buddhas formerly belonging to the empress dowager—" Then, lest they inquire how the substitution had been made, Yuan hurried on. "So, here I am, forced to bid farewell to my profession. And this—*this*—" shaking the tiny figure dramatically—"has been my downfall! Now, I propose to destroy it before all of you. I do this in order that it may never have another opportunity to bring about the tribulation that it has caused me." He turned to a waiter standing near the door. "Fetch me a mortar and pestle."

The servant, stationed in readiness for this command, disappeared from the room.

Gazing at the Buddha in his right hand, Yuan thrust his left casually in the pocket where reposed the crude glass figurine, wrapped in a handkerchief. Slowly he pulled out the bit of silk. He remembered that Tseng had remarked on the coldness of the day and decided to reverse the procedure now.

"It is warm in here, isn't it?"

Yuan attempted to make his voice matter of fact.

After a short delay the mortar and pestle was set before him. This was the crucial moment. There was a throb in Yuan's heart that was nearly unbearable.

Very slowly he wiped the back and the palm of his right hand with his handkerchief, and managed to exchange the two figurines. Hurriedly he placed the cheap, painted, glass Buddha in the mortar, giving the guests but a glimpse of it. He dropped his hand, for an instant and with an effect of carelessness, over the top.

"Gentlemen," he said quietly, "I intend to smash this!"

With a sigh of relief Yuan crashed down the pestle. He pounded until the image was completely pulverized. Then, lest the others note that the dust remaining was glass and not stone, he again summoned the waiter and had the pestle and mortar immediately removed from the room.

The headlines that appeared in the papers the following morning were exactly as Yuan had hoped:

MANAGER OF CHENG CHONG
SMASHES BUDDHA PAWNED
FOR FIFTY THOUSAND

As Yuan had planned, his friends, the reporters, had not permitted the story to escape them.

He read the accounts, his jaws tightening with grim satisfaction; then he went to the nearest police bureau. There he asked for the detail of a constable in plain clothes.

This was quickly granted, since the police constable had read the accounts in the morning paper and knew Yuan by sight.

"Anything we can do to help you catch that crook? Don't you wish to swear out a complaint?"

"I hope to do that today," answered the manager with a greater display of confidence than he felt, although his scheme had worked without a hitch so far.

ACCOMPANIED by the policeman, he returned to his home, which was but a short distance from the offices of Cheng Chong's. There he composed himself to the hardest task yet—to wait. The remainder of that day, that night, the next morning, he waited. It seemed an eternity.

At three o'clock in the afternoon of the second day, the former chief clerk of Cheng Chong's came rushing into Yuan's quarters. The man's face was pale, like the ashes of a forgotten fire.

"The firm! Cheng Chong! Ruined!" the clerk burst out.

"Ruined— By what?"

"By what? By what? Do you think we can stand *two* losses of fifty thousand dollars? And you—*you!*" Here anger got the better of the clerk, and he stuttered wordlessly. At last he managed to say, "The man Tseng—has come back—for his Buddha!"

"Has Tseng the money to redeem the image?" asked Yuan, his eyes gleaming.

"Money? Of course. He has the principal you gave him. The pawn fee he's probably borrowed somewhere else. Oh, can't you see? Can't you realize? Here, we have him and we can not do a thing! Yes, and he knows we can't! We—"

"Come on, let us go over to the office," the manager cut in. "You can talk to me as we go."

Yuan nodded to the constable, who immediately arose to accompany them. The three men set out hurriedly for Cheng Chong's. But, in spite of the swiftness of their pace, the clerk continued to mourn:

"You with your insane action night before last! You destroyed the only evidence we had! He's read the papers, and now he's brazen enough to come back and mulct us of another fifty thousand! Because we have no Buddha to return! If we had him arrested now there would be no proof."

Tseng was standing at the counter calmly enough, when Yuan arrived. He faced the manager with a smile that held in it a world of insolent bravado It was a cruel countenance, rapacious. Yuan wondered how he ever misread it.

"I understand," Tseng began crisply, "that you had a moment of aberration night before last—and destroyed my valuable Buddha. A pity, isn't it? For here—" he drew from the sable lined robe a packet of bills—"here is the money to redeem it. If you remember, I told you it would bring at a forced sale at least two hundred thousand. However, I shall compromise with you. You shall write off the fifty thousand you loaned me, with, of course, pawn fees and interest charges. In addition to that, you will compensate me for the loss of my Buddha by paying another fifty thousand." He hesitated, palpably for effect, and then concluded, "I shall give you five minutes to consider my offer. If you refuse, I shall call the police."

Without replying, Yuan drew from his robe the substitute onyx Buddha.

Tseng gave one look at it, then his jaw dropped ludicrously. He caught his breath with a whistling gasp, wheeled and ran headlong toward the door—into the waiting arms of the constable. Tseng fought for a moment with the policeman, but was overpowered. He turned then and cursed Yuan wildly, implicating himself with every word.

At last he grew weary of this and stood apathetically in the grasp of the constable. The latter roughly dived into Tseng's pockets, pulled out the roll of bank notes and tossed the money to Yuan. The policeman next produced a pair of handcuffs and manacled one of those light fingered, prehensile hands to his own.

A tremendously relieved but mystified chief clerk pulled back the storm door.

Yuan went thoughtfully back to the office marked "Manager" and took up his usual duties there.

His first official act was to place the tiny Buddha on the desk before him. "That," he informed the chief clerk, "will be to remind me that nothing is as valuable in *our* business as—caution!"

A Novel of the Kentucky Racetracks and Groody's Great Flying Circus

By

THOMSON BURTIS

THE DAY the Groody Flyers, a gypsy stunt outfit, arrived in Covington, Kentucky, for an engagement at the fair, Reilly, the mechanic and property man, discovered that the ladder used by George Groody in the plane changing stunt had been cut nearly in two. Groody's nerve had already been shaken by a series of mysterious letters threatening his life if he continued in the air circus work, and his friends, Bob Corrigan and Tom Service, pleaded with him to lay off. However, a valuable oil property in Texas, jointly owned by the three, was dependent for maintenance upon the money gained by filling the dangerous contracts in the work Groody hated, and he refused to cancel the engagement. Suspicion fell upon Sparrow Cantoni, a product of the sidewalks of New York, who piloted one of the Groody ships.

Later that day a letter arrived from one Buddy Redfield, half owner of Prince Regent, America's premier racehorse of the year before. The other owner was Slim Evans, an old friend of Groody and his associates—Corrigan and Service. Redfield, at Evans's behest, invited the Groody Flyers to purchase a third interest in Prince Regent, entered in the very rich Special to be run at Latonia. The prize money, should the horse win, would enable Groody and his friends to drop the stunt work and begin exploiting their Texas property.

Redfield, in laying his cards on the table, made it known that Prince Regent had a slim chance of winning because of the machinations of a Kin Beaseley, gambler and all around bad man, and sworn enemy of the Redfield Stable.

The next morning Groody went over to the stables to watch Prince Regent work out. While he and Redfield were following the progress of the horse and his little colored jockey, Two Spot Jackson, they

Part II

HANDICAPS

were suddenly startled to hear the report of a rifle and see the jockey waver in the saddle. Groody got into a plane and took off, following a suspicious looking motor car.

In the first clearing he landed his ship, and when the car came up, he took the driver prisoner.

"How much did Kin Beaseley pay you for this job?" Groody asked.

The captive, who said his name was Joe Painterfield, confessed to the shooting.

"But who is this Kin Beaseley?" he asked. Then— "Wouldn't you like to know who I *do* work for?"

While Groody was clearing the roadway of the automobile, Painterfield tried to escape in his ship, and the flyer dashed forward to prevent it.

CHAPTER V

THE SPARROW UNDER SURVEILLANCE

THE FLYER'S action was purely automatic. He bounded forward and as he reached the tail surfaces of the plane, the ship was picking up speed. Groody hurled himself toward the vertical fin and got a grip upon it. The tail hit the ground with a thud. As he scrambled aboard, a thousand thoughts were rushing through his head. That Painterfield could fly, there was no doubt. He was keeping the ship on a straight course down the road almost as well as Groody himself could have

done, and he had not cut the motor. There could be no doubt about it—he was going to try to take off with Groody aboard.

"And then shake me off after he gets in the air," Groody thought.

For the fraction of a second he considered kicking in the elevators and rudder so that the ship could not be controlled, but that would mean the sure loss of the plane for flying purposes until new parts were sent from the factory. He must try to save it to fulfil that circus contract . . .

He found himself crawling up the back of the fuselage. The plane was roaring along the road, almost at flying speed. His fingers dug through the linen, and with the aid of the cross braces, he was able to get a grip which kept him from being shaken off. His hands were on the cowling of the rear cockpit as the Hawk took the air.

Painterfield, bent forward over the stick in the front seat, lost no time. The ship was barely fifteen feet high when he dived abruptly. Groody's body rose from the plane and his grasp on the cowling was almost broken, but he held on. The next second Painterfield had zoomed dizzily and, almost at the top of it, he threw the plane over into a vertical bank.

Groody hung on desperately with hands and legs. His goggleless eyes were almost blinded by the propeller wash, and the breath was torn from his nostrils as the ship dropped dizzily in a sideslip. Painterfield brought it out scarcely five feet above the ground, and for a few seconds he was forced to fly level. The only thing that saved Groody from being thrown off was the lack of altitude. The ship could not be maneuvered freely then, but if Painterfield gained even a hundred feet before Groody got into the cockpit, the rangy pilot would be lost.

Painterfield was looking back at him, alert for the opportunity which Groody's attempt to get into the cockpit would give him. He could fly right out from underneath the circus pilot during the second when Groody was getting into the seat.

He gathered himself, and his long fingers curled around the leather cushions of the cowling with such force that they were white. He pulled himself up until he was almost erect, bestriding the back of the fuselage as a rider would a horse. His eyes, watering as the terrific air blasts whipped them, rested unwaveringly on Painterfield's face. Suddenly, in one lightning-like motion he plunged forward, head first into the cockpit, his hands grasping for the rudder bar.

Was Painterfield desperate enough to dare a loop? Groody's feet were still thrust out of the cockpit as Painterfield threw the ship into a terrific vertical bank. The cockpit was so small that Groody could not get into proper position and retain his hold on the rudder bar. He did not know what Painterfield was doing, but the ship was like an outlaw horse, bucking and whirling through the air.

Suddenly it was flying along level. As Groody succeeded in folding his legs under him and getting to his knees, he felt that the Hawk was stalling. He was on his knees. As he raised his head he got a glimpse of Painterfield. The racetrack man had loosened his belt and was standing up. In his hand was a heavy spur which he had evidently removed from his boot. Groody threw up his arm just in time to ward off the blow.

THE NEXT second, just as the pilotless ship was falling into a spin, he was back on the seat, the stick in his hands and his foot on the rudder. For a split second he was tempted to put it into reenversement and throw Painterfield out before he had a chance to get back into the seat. The latter, as though sensing his half formed intention, dropped back.

"I'm glad I didn't," was the thought which ran through Groody's racing mind. "He wouldn't be of any use to us dead."

The pilot's narrow eyes were like two lines of fire, blazing in his face with the unholy joy of the battle he had won.

He reached down for the tool kit. He was climbing the ship gradually, laying a

course toward Covington. He found a heavy Stilson wrench. As he straightened up, Painterfield's eyes were blazing into his own. A brilliant smile flashed across the younger man's face, and his fingers touched his forehead in a jaunty salute to Groody, his conqueror.

Groody raised the wrench uncertainly, and as Painterfield got sight of it, his grin widened. He gestured toward it and shook his head as though disapproving of the foolish impulse of some child. It was as if he were saying, "Don't be silly."

Groody hesitated. Then he found himself grinning back at his foeman.

"You're a thug and a no good, murdering hound," he chuckled to himself. "But I'm damned if I don't doff the plumed chapeau to you just the same!"

The revelation of Painterfield's ability to fly had stunned him. As he thought back over those action crammed minutes on the ground and in the air, he grinned.

"What a lucky stiff I am," he thought. "The cards were sure stacked against me —and what a tough baby Joe turned out to be. Good Lord, there's the breeding farm!"

There it was, a few miles ahead of him. He had been flying only six or seven minutes. Somehow he had the idea that his battle with Painterfield had taken place a long way from civilization, or human aid.

"We were just around the corner, as it were," he thought.

For the moment he had forgotten himself in the exaltation of his victory, but the sight of the white stables and the flying field dissipated his feeling of satisfaction. All his troubles swept back over him in an overwhelming rush of emotion.

He glanced at his wrist watch. It was only eight o'clock. He had the feeling that it should be late afternoon. He debated whether or not to land at the breeding farm, and finally decided against it. Accordingly, he flew low over the track and the long lines of white buildings, but he did not see Redfield among the dozens of men and boys who were looking up at him.

Five minutes later he was spiraling down over the landing field. There were half a dozen men sitting on the ground in front of the hangar, in addition to a uniformed policeman. There was a Jenny on the line, in addition to the circus ship, which meant that Delaney was making an early morning call.

"He sure is underfoot plenty," Groody thought. "Damned if I don't like the roughneck, though."

The big, rugged faced, tenor voiced vagabond of the air seemed to Groody like an affectionate, lumbering Newfoundland dog. Delaney was so naive in his admiration of Groody, so anxious to please, and so delighted at any intimacy between himself and the circus flyers, that it was impossible not to like him.

"He might help us out a little, too," Groody thought to himself. "If we should happen to need a flyer, he'd jump at the chance."

He brought his ship down low over the northern hills, and as he landed, all the men trooped out on the field, awaiting him as he taxied to the line. One of them was Buddy Redfield, and his brown eyes were turbulent as they rested unwaveringly on the unembarrassed Painterfield.

Groody cut the switches and leaped from his cockpit.

"Here's our man," he announced. "Climb out, Joseph, and let the boys look you over."

"So you got him," Redfield said, and his low pitched voice was vibrant with feeling. He was talking to Groody, but his eyes never left Painterfield. "How did you do it?"

GROODY told them briefly, while Painterfield leaned nonchalantly against the ship. He seemed to enjoy the story. His bright, hard blue eyes flickered from face to face, resting longest on Redfield.

"That's what we did, and that's what he said," Groody concluded. "And he

swears he won't talk any more except to the authorities."

"It s-strikes me," Service remarked, "t-that he's said quite a mouthful already."

"If you think that's a mouthful," Painterfield told them airily, "you're going to be knocked dead by the rest of it."

"Where did you learn to fly?" Groody demanded.

"Oh, I was a sergeant in the Air Service during the war," Painterfield answered. "I picked up quite a little of it. I damn' near put one over on you, too, didn't I? If that damn' Lizzy had only started, and you'd been in it . . ."

"You might have got away with it," Groody admitted. He produced a cigar and thrust it into the corner of his mouth. "You were pointed back for the mountains to do a hideout, eh?" he went on.

"Right you are," Painterfield admitted. "I was born up there. If I'd have had fifteen more minutes, the whole Army Air Service and the National Guard wouldn't have had a Chinaman's chance to smoke me out."

Redfield was silent, but his eyes were not good to see as they rested steadily on the man who had attempted to kill Prince Regent.

"Pretty dumb of you to do your stuff when you must have known there was a plane nearby," Corrigan said.

"I'm not admitting anything before you guys," Painterfield told them flatly. "But supposin' I was sent out there to get rid of that colt. I'd have gone through with it, wouldn't I? It was the best chance we'd have. I couldn't figure on a ship chasing me, and even if I had, I couldn't figure on things happening like they did. What's your name—Groody? Well, you pulled off a neat trick, mister."

The policeman was standing in the background. Sparrow Cantoni and Reilly were listening silently. Tom Service's round blue eyes were probing into Painterfield's. Delaney ran his fingers through his hair and shook his head in amazement.

"You boys sure carry excitement right along with you," he said.

"I thought I knew you!" Redfield suddenly exploded. "Weren't you a betting commissioner a couple of years ago for the Rankin horses?"

Painterfield nodded.

"Got fired for making a little too free use of the money, didn't you?" Redfield went on.

"I ain't wagging my jaw any whatever, Redfield," Painterfield said.

"Well, by heaven, you will," Redfield said softly.

"How's Two Spot Jackson?" Groody inquired.

"All right," Redfield said, without looking at him. He seemed fascinated by Painterfield.

"He'll be able to ride Saturday all right, Redfield says," Corrigan broke in.

"Well, we might as well send Painterfield to jail with the officer here," Service said finally.

"And I'll go with them," Redfield said meaningly.

"O. K," Painterfield said. "Remember what I told you, Groody. The more I talk, the more there must be in it for me. How about it, Redfield? If I come clean, do you boys call it square?"

"Not by a damn' sight," Redfield told him furiously. "We're on our guard now, and I hope you get stuck for life!"

"Oh-ho!" Painterfield said, studying the round faced little horseman without emotion. "Well, we'll see."

"Come on," ordered the policeman. "I'll be back, Mr. Service, as soon as I get this egg in the coop."

"Certainly," Tom agreed. "We'll watch until then."

"Any more news?" Groody asked, flopping to the ground wearily.

Tom shook his head.

"Not a thing more's been uncovered during the night," he said. "No flying circus tried to get this engagement; there are no flying outfits in this vicinity, except Delaney's, and he just does passenger carrying."

"I'm glad of that," Delaney piped in his high voice. "It would sure look bad for us if we was a circus outfit."

"Jeest!" said Sparrow Cantoni. "I seen some rough stuff pulled off on them New York tracks by the boys, but this is a new gag—shooting a horse before a race. I don't see what whoever's behind it's up to. In the field they have for the Special, there ain't no standouts."

"By the way, Sparrow," Corrigan said casually. "I wish you'd walk down to that little store and get me some cigarets."

FOR a moment, the little Italian's black eyes stared into Corrigan's. A full package of cigarets bulged the pocket of the huge flyer's shirt. Then Cantoni turned abruptly and made off without a word.

Reilly's troubled eyes followed him and the Irishman's face was woebegone. Groody looked at Service and Corrigan wordlessly. What was in Cantoni's mind seemed very obvious to him.

"I thought it better to get rid of him for a while," Corrigan stated. "I've got something in my mind that I don't want him to hear."

His eyes flickered toward Delaney. That gentleman's square face was a study. He put his hand on the ground as though to get up.

"Want me to get out?" he asked without resentment. "I don't want to butt in."

"Yes, we do," Corrigan said bluntly. "No offense, Delaney, but it's just something that we don't want anybody but ourselves to know. Take a little walk for yourself, will you?"

"Sure," Delaney said humbly, and strolled toward the ships.

"I'll bet I know what's on your mind," Groody told Corrigan. "It hit me on the way back. How about you, Tom? Has the detective's brain absorbed a hunch from this morning?"

Service took off his glasses and polished them absently.

"It has occurred to me that the fact that Painterfield is a flyer supplies a possible connecting link between whatever is happening to Redfield and the conspiracy against us," he said. "There's probably nothing in it, but it would certainly be peculiar if Redfield and we had a mutual enemy."

"So peculiar," Groody stated, removing his cigar, "that it sounds crazy. I can't see a chance in a million for it to happen, but . . ."

"Yes?" Corrigan encouraged.

"But," Groody resumed, "this. If some one was out to get us, which they are, and discovered that we were considering investing in a damned good horse with a chance to make a lot of money within a week, they might extend their operations to the horse, just as another little item to hurt us."

"Exactly," Service agreed. "H-how m-much talking have any of us d-done? Reilly, have you mentioned anything about this horse r-race to a-anybody?"

"No, sor."

"I haven't peeped," Groody said.

"I haven't either," said Corrigan.

"I know I haven't," Service said. "Did any one overhear you and Buddy Redfield making the arrangements?"

"Only Delaney was there, but he wasn't in on the full conversation."

"We'll have to ask Redfield whether he's spread the news," Service said. "That seems impossible because he's trying to keep everything about Prince Regent as much of a secret as possible, isn't he?"

Groody nodded.

"I don't believe there's anything in the idea," he said. "But of course, there might be. I think that this Kin Beaseley hates Redfield like poison, knows that Prince Regent is the family jewels and that the old thug just wants to destroy the horse out of pure cussedness. On the other hand, that don't square with what Painterfield said. Oh, hell, let's forget it for a while. We're going around in circles and Painterfield's going to talk anyhow. Say, didn't it strike you boys that sending him after cigarets didn't set so well on Sparrow?"

"It didn't," Reilly said bluntly. "He's

wise to something, Lieutenant—that I'm watching him, I mean."

"That's what I think," Groody said. "He feels that he's under suspicion, I believe, right now."

"I h-hope not," Service said. "If h-he's on h-his guard, we'll have small chance of catching him. How do you f-feel, George?"

"O. K."

"Sure?"

"Sure."

Groody felt the eyes of his two friends on him and knew their unspoken thoughts. It would have been bad enough to know what they were thinking, but it was infinitely worse to realize that what they thought was true. There was something radically wrong with him. Ordinarily, the prospect of the week ahead would have filled him with tingling excitement and a keen anticipation of battles to come—the winning or losing of a fortune. Now even the race seemed a menace. He had not one atom of self-confidence left in him.

"Listen, George," Corrigan said harshly. "Tom and I've been talking this thing over. You're a wreck—just living on your nerve. Sparrow Cantoni is under suspicion. We're set to shoot for that whole wad we need in Texas this week, without flying a damn' mile. Between one thing and another, you're worn out right now. Let's call off the whole works."

"No."

GROODY said that as if it had been forced from him. There was nothing, as a matter of fact, that he would have liked better, but he was recalling how closely he had come to funking back there in the hills. He was shrinking from everything, that was certain. Equally certain, however, was the fact that he would rather be dead than to hate himself, as he would, if he did not carry on.

His aquiline face was a study, and when he spoke, his voice was satirical.

"I'm not saying that right at this minute I'm looking forward to climbing around like a monkey for the next week," he said deliberately. "But it's got to be done just the same. We're not even sure that we'll invest a nickel in Prince Regent. His leg may go bad, or Buddy may advise against it. If that happened, we'd be stranded here without a job, with very little chance of making any *dinero* and Texas would be just crying for dough, so be yourselves. I don't need any nurses."

Corrigan's rugged face was sullen. He got up as though it would be unpleasant to continue the discussion.

"All right," he said doggedly. "But I'm damned if this isn't driving me crazy."

Reilly had wandered off into the hangar. Tom Service's round eyes were very soft as they met Groody's.

"Listen, George," he said gently. "There aren't any secrets between us. You're feeling even worse than you have been lately . . ."

"No, I'm not, Tom," Groody said gruffly. "I'm all right, and I'm going on through."

"Why?" Tom asked gently.

Fifteen years of the kind of love which is only possible between two men, and then rarely, surcharged the quiet dialogue with emotion. Groody would not have said what he did to any other human being.

"I don't exactly know, Tom," he said slowly. "I've got to hating myself."

"Just because you've got your wind up a little over continuing to do things which there are not a thousand people in the world would dare to do even once," Service said. "Be yourself, George, old-timer. That's about as sensible as standing beside a railroad track and despising yourself because you haven't got the nerve to throw yourself in front of an engine. I've never seen you this way, old man."

"No, it isn't that, exactly," Groody told him. His gray eyes were gazing absently into the distance. "It's more than that, somehow. Must be getting old, or something. I don't like to be this way—jumpy nerved, I mean. I'd go crazy if I quit—the stunts, I mean—just because I was scared for no reason. It would be

hell to think that I'd passed up a chance for us to crash through heavy, don't you see? We've got our chance to hit the world a wallop and prove that we can put over something besides trooping around winning a few fights and getting three squares a day. Hell, a Polack immigrant can do that."

Tom nodded. Sparrow Cantoni was making toward them, his eyes on the ground and a paper bag swinging listlessly in his hand.

"I know what you mean," Service said evenly, "but it's hell on the rest of us to put it all on your shoulders."

"Don't be silly," said Groody. "Right now I do the stunts, but we've worked up to this chance all together, and you and Bob have had as much, or more, to do with it as I have. Let's forget it. What time is the flight scheduled?"

"9:30. They want to get them out early."

"Climbing around the ship and then a change on the ladder, eh?"

Tom nodded.

"Is there an emergency landing field anywhere near the grounds?" Groody asked.

"Yeah, a little one," Sparrow Cantoni interjected. "We could get down in it all right, but we couldn't get out in a thousand years."

"By the way, Sparrow," Groody said, flipping the ash from his cigar. "We're going to switch a little this morning."

"Yeah? How?"

"Well, instead of Corrigan flying the ladder and me jumping from your wing to his ship, I'm up in Corrigan's ship and you'll fly the ladder over."

"That's the bunk," exclaimed Cantoni. "We been doing it the other way, ain't we? We're practised up the other way, ain't we?"

"It doesn't make much difference," Service said gently.

Groody was watching the slim little Italian from the corner of his eye. He felt that if he met those shoe button eyes squarely, his thoughts would be as plain to Cantoni as they were to himself.

"The hell it doesn't," Cantoni said. "It makes a hell of a lot of difference, I'd say! I ain't used to flying from the top spot, and I'm used to easing my wing up just like Corrigan's used to figuring on that ladder."

"Well, we'll try it, anyway," Groody said decisively.

HE RAISED his eyes to meet Cantoni's for the first time. The little Italian was seething with fury. Resentment flamed in his eyes, and his face was dark with a rush of blood. He looked as though he would like to spring at Groody like a tiger, and when he tried to speak his wrath choked him. His lips twisted in a snarl as he turned and walked swiftly away.

Groody looked at Service.

"He *is* wise," he snapped.

Service removed his glasses and his bland countenance was serious.

"H-he is," he said slowly. "A-and more than t-that, I believe he's guilty. He doesn't g-get out of our sight from now on."

CHAPTER VI

CANTONI MISCUES

REDFIELD had not returned when the two Hawks took off. Groody was in the front seat of the ship which Corrigan was flying, riding in the front cockpit to facilitate climbing out on the wing. As the plane flew over Covington, toward Cincinnati, he glanced frequently at Sparrow Cantoni, who was flying barely a hundred feet away. The little pilot looked entirely too small to handle his sturdy ship, despite that he was flying, as always, with a cushion under him and one behind his back. Cantoni was as motionless in his seat as a statue. He had not exchanged a word with the other flyers before the takeoff, but his face had plainly revealed the emotions which were working within him.

In a moment the exposition grounds

were in sight, and Groody glanced at them without interest. Early as it was they were thronged with people. The Groody Flyers had refused flatly to give more than two shows a day for any price, so the officials had decided that the night display of the electrically wired ships could not be dispensed with, and that the other circus should be given in the morning. A large crowd would automatically pass through the turnstile in the afternoon, so a special attraction in the morning was more valuable to them.

Pedestrians on the streets of Cincinnati gathered into groups on street corners, and it was plain that there would be many thousands of onlookers who did not pay their way into the grounds.

Corrigan was flying at a thousand feet to save time. The first part of Groody's performance would take place close to the ground, so that as few people as possible could see it without paying admission.

As they approached the huge enclosure on the outskirts of the city, Groody's eyes roved nervously over the terrain in search of a landing field should the motor cut out. As Sparrow had said, there was really but one field within gliding distance of a point two thousand feet above the grounds, where a ship would have a chance to land safely. There were, however, several small vacant lots, and a forced landing would not mean crashing into houses, trees or other obstacles.

Cantoni climbed steadily to twenty-five hundred feet, the altitude at which the ship change would be made. Corrigan dropped down to five hundred feet and circled the grounds twice. People poured from the exposition buildings to watch; the throng on the midway ceased to patronize the games and shows, and five thousand people became motionless, their eyes lifted to the sky.

After a second circling of the field, Corrigan sent his ship a few hundred yards northward, banked, and as its nose pointed directly across the fair grounds, Groody loosened his belt and climbed out on the lower right wing. Cantoni was circling high above them. This first part of the show did not bother Groody greatly —he was sure of the strength in that rawhide body of his, and Bob Corrigan was at the stick.

Clinging to the ground and flying wires, and the struts, he walked along the edge of the wing. He was at its tip as the ship reached the grounds. He clung to the outer strut and a moment later his legs were swinging clear of the wing, his back to the terrific airstream. With his left hand he got a good grip on the small opening in the wing provided for just that purpose. As the ship got fairly over the center of the grounds, he was hanging by his hands—one clinging to the strut and the other to that specially prepared grip. An instant later he released his grip on the strut, and his right hand was grasping the strongly braced wing skid beneath the wing. There he clung, swinging in space as Corrigan carefully banked at the northern edge of the grounds and started back over the breathless crowd.

On the second trip Groody got his other hand on the wing skid. Again Corrigan sent his ship a quarter of a mile northward from the grounds, as Groody climbed back upon the wing. His stringy steel muscles were not bothered by the ordeal at all. Until recently, a combination of vast air experience, which had made him almost contemptuous of altitude, plus the particular type of cold nerve that was his, had made a gymnastic feat just as simple to execute at two thousand feet as it would have been only five feet from the ground. Now, though, he unconsciously avoided looking downward.

ON THE third trip across the grounds he was crawling out on the motor and up to the top surface of the center section. Corrigan was climbing gradually as Groody seated himself, leaning forward against the airstream, his hands in the specially prepared grips on the leading edge of the center section. Corrigan was circling as he sent the ship upward, and Groody's body was outlined against the

sky. At a thousand feet, directly over the center of the grounds, Groody looked back at Corrigan and nodded. Corrigan sent the ship into a dive. Its speed picked up to one hundred and fifty miles an hour and Groody's lanky body was leaning farther and farther backward. As the ship flashed down to six hundred feet in a full power dive, the speed was at least one hundred and ninety miles an hour. Groody was gripping the center section struts with his feet, and the hand grips with all his strength. Corrigan eased back on the stick. Slowly and gracefully the ship curved upward in a smooth arc and over on its back. A second later it was rushing out of the loop. So perfectly had the maneuver been performed that the motor had not missed a beat. Centrifugal force held Groody on the wing.

As always, there had been a wild leap of his heart during that second when he was upside down. It was sickening this time, though, whereas before it had always left him with a mad excitement which had little of fear in it. Now the ship was right side up again, and Corrigan zoomed smoothly to take advantage of the excess speed. He sent it into a steep climb while Groody maintained his airy perch on the center section.

Cantoni was circling. He had already released the ladder, which was attached by special cables to the spreader bar of the undercarriage, and two of the struts. Its weighted lower end was streaming out behind the ship. When Corrigan reached two thousand feet, he was still north of the grounds. Groody crawled along the upper right wing toward its tip, until finally he had his hands around the metal cabane strut which was strongly attached to the leading edge of the wing. He sank to one knee, clinging to the strut, as Corrigan started back across the grounds. Sparrow was three hundred yards behind them, and fifteen feet higher.

Groody waited tensely, his head turned to watch Cantoni. Corrigan had throttled the Wright as low as he could and still maintain flying speed. Groody could see Cantoni's face, which seemed all goggles, thrust over the cowling of the cockpit. Sparrow was overtaking them rapidly, dropping gradually lower. He was but fifteen feet back of them now, and the ladder would pass directly over Groody's head. Groody was squatting on his heels, still maintaining his grip on the cabane strut. He half rose and now he was holding by only one hand. The ladder was but five feet behind and overhauling him steadily. It seemed that the propeller of Cantoni's ship was whirring almost over his head. Slowly he straightened, leaning against the airstream. He had nothing to hold to now. A second later and the last rung of the ladder was almost scraping his head. Cantoni was flying beautifully . . .

Groody's hands reached for the ladder. He leaned forward slightly. It was right there for him . . .

As his fingers touched it the ladder seemed to leap upward, as though to avoid him. Groody toppled forward. For an agonized eternity he fought for balance, looking down into space. The ladder was out of reach, way ahead of him.

The next instant his feet were no longer even touching the entering edge of the wing. Some cry escaped him, unheard even by himself above the bellowing roar of the two motors, as he felt himself in the air. For a fraction of a second he was numb and without feeling. Mercifully he could not comprehend the fact that he was starting on a half mile fall to the ground.

Then he did realize. Suddenly his mind was clear as a crystal and a thousand memories swept through it. He knew that Cantoni had got him.

Then, zooming up before him came a wing. For that brief length of time he had been traveling forward, at the same speed at which the ship had been going. His body thudded against the wing of Corrigan's ship. As his hands froze around the leading edge, he comprehended what Corrigan had done. Knowing that Groody could never regain his balance, he had

turned the motor full on, dived slightly and caught Groody's body again.

For a moment Groody lay on the top wing. His breath was coming in great gasps and he was trembling all over. He fought to calm himself. He did not look around at Corrigan, nor down at the awe struck mob of spectators below him. His eyes never left Cantoni's ship, now more than fifty yards ahead of them. Cantoni was looking back. He was pointed southward toward Covington and was speeding over the field, apparently with motor wide open, in a gradual dive.

Suddenly Groody became himself again, and it was as though a crushing burden had been swept from his shoulders. The thing, which he had dreaded for weeks without any idea of what it would be, had arrived—and he had survived it. The dark shadow of which he had lived in fear had become a reality, and he had escaped it. He had become, all at once, the reckless adventurer again, with a hard self-confidence that was above fear of anything or anybody, including defeat.

CORRIGAN'S rugged face was drawn and set. No sooner had Groody swung down into the front cockpit, than he sent his ship into a dive which made the struts jump in their sockets and the wires shrill with the strain. He was following Cantoni's plane like a hound in sight of its prey.

It seemed to Groody that his mind was clearer than it had been in days. His condition had made him woolly minded, he realized now, unable to give details their full value or to think straight. Cantoni had tried to get rid of him without suspicion falling upon himself. That seemed a certainty. Was the little Italian responsible for those anonymous letters himself, or was he merely the tool of some one else? Would he try to escape, or try to brazen it out? If the latter, what should be the procedure of the Groody circus? His mind working like an orderly machine, Groody came to a decision. It would be madness to allow Cantoni to fly again, of course. It was equally certain that at the moment there was not evidence sufficient to convict the little pilot of anything.

It was apparent now that Cantoni was not endeavoring to escape. He was circling down over the field, and as Corrigan swept south to turn for his landing, Groody had made up his mind. The old joy in prospective battle was glowing within him, for he felt now that he could win. No more terrible combination of circumstances could possibly face him than he had just survived, through the skill of Corrigan and his own alertness.

The ship had barely touched the ground, its motor idling, before Groody was kneeling in the front seat, yelling into Corrigan's ear.

"Not a word against Sparrow," he shouted.

"Damn it, you're crazy," bellowed Corrigan. "I'm going to wring that little spaghetti bender's neck."

"No, you're not," Groody told him. "Listen."

As the ship stopped rolling and it was unnecessary to shout, he talked rapidly for a moment. Cantoni had taxied to the line.

"Well, all right," Corrigan agreed harshly.

"There's not much chance of third degreeing a confession out of him. He's too hard for that," Groody said. "We've got him dead to rights now, and he'll give himself away. By the way—thanks, Bob. I was a goner until you—"

"How do you feel?" interrupted Corrigan, avoiding Groody's eyes.

"Better than I have in weeks," Groody answered.

Corrigan glanced at him quickly as he swung the plane around for the line, and for a few seconds his bold black eyes rested steadily on Groody's. What he saw was sufficient to make him say in bewilderment:

"Well, I'll be damned! Got the bugs out of your mind, have you?"

"The old story," Groody told him with a grin.

It was the old story of the flying man. The cure of faint heartedness is usually complete when that which is dreaded actually happens and is survived.

Redfield and the policeman were on the line, along with Service and Reilly, Groody noted. He climbed out of the ship while Corrigan ran out the motor, just as Cantoni vaulted from his own plane. The little Italian was walking toward him, and his step did not lag nor did he show embarrassment or foreboding. Rather there was savage defiance in his shoe button eyes; it seemed that he was daring Groody to say anything.

"What happened, George?" Service asked mildly. "Didn't go through with the change, eh?"

"No," Groody answered. "The ladder jumped out of my way. What happened, Sparrow? Bump hit you?"

Cantoni's eyes burned into his.

"I don't know what happened," he said flatly. "A bump, I s'pose. The crate just jumped for some reason. Then I seen you in the air and Corrigan catch you . . ."

"What?" It was Redfield, and his wide eyes traveled from man to man with stunned bewilderment in them. "What happened?"

Groody inserted a long cigar in his mouth.

"I fell off the ship reaching for the ladder," he said. "Bob, here, picked up speed and caught me."

Tom Service did not say a word. His round blue eyes were like daggers stabbing into Cantoni's.

"Just as I straightened to grab it," Groody went on calmly, "it just popped out of my reach and I couldn't regain my balance."

CANTONI'S eyes darted from face to face.

"It wasn't my fault," he flared. "I told you I wasn't used to flying the ladder, but I didn't move when she hopped and I know what you're thinking—every damn' one of you." He was trembling uncontrollably. "Well, you can think what you please, see? You ain't got a thing on me, and I'm quittin' right now!"

"Who said we had anything on you?" Service asked crisply.

"And who said we blamed you?" Groody snapped.

Corrigan did not say a word, but there was lightning in his eyes. He looked as though he would like to leap on Cantoni and tear him limb from limb.

"Nobody said it, but do you think I'm a halfwit?" sneered Sparrow. "Think I don't know you've had Reilly watching me ever since yesterday? Think I don't know why you had me fly the ladder? It's because you think I'm in on all this—that's the reason why! Well, I'm quittin', see, and you can all go to hell!"

"Suppose we don't want you to quit?" Service asked suavely.

"I'd quit anyway," raged Cantoni. "All you guys standin' around and trying to make a goat out of me! Well, you can't do it, see?"

He flung his helmet and goggles to the ground, utterly beside himself with rage. Groody, studying him coolly, wondered. There were all the earmarks of a cornered rat in Sparrow Cantoni.

Groody glanced at Service. He wanted to reassure Tom before he said what he did.

"Listen, Sparrow," he said quietly. "If you want to quit, go ahead, but you don't have to. Why not stick around?"

"Get away from me," raged Cantoni, "or I'll—"

"What?" snapped Groody.

The word was like a pistol shot and for an instant Cantoni's mouth worked, but the words would not come. He stared up into the cold gray eyes above him.

"I'll—I'll . . ."

His rage would not allow him to talk. The little flyer was utterly mad at that moment.

"And I'll get you for this some day, if it takes a year," he finally shouted. "All right, listen—you flatfoot!"

He flung these words into the face of the

policeman who had walked into the group. Half walking and half running, the little pilot made for the road which led past the field.

"What's all this?" demanded the policeman.

"Not a thing," Service said crisply, "except that we want you to get to the nearest telephone and have that man shadowed."

A few words of explanation and the officer was on his way to the nearest house.

"A guilty conscience is its own accuser?" Groody said with a rising inflection.

Service took off his glasses.

"Yes," he said. "And I believe we have our lead. In two or three days, every move that Sparrow has ever made can be traced pretty accurately; and if it takes six months, we'll find out who and what his contacts have been since he has been working for us. I'll have every one I know in the Federal Service on this job. It was an inside job on that ladder. Sparrow was the logical suspect. He has motives—"

"And airplanes don't hop out of the way under their own power," Groody interrupted. "If there had been a bump, Bob, we'd have felt it ourselves."

"Sure," Corrigan said disgustedly. "And furthermore, I don't like this business of letting him get away."

"He won't get away," Service objected. "George was right. We have nothing on him which would hold in a court of law, and the moment we took definite measures, the whole gang, if there is a gang, would cease operations. I hoped we'd be able to let him hang himself definitely, but if the shadowing is done properly, we'll eventually round him up with enough on him to clap him behind the bars."

"It strikes me," Groody said meditatively, "that he might have been working all on his own. If he scared me out of doing this stuff, he would immediately leap into the big money doing it himself, wouldn't he?"

"You may be right," nodded Service. "First he tried to scare you out, but finally he attempted murder. He could figure that this flying circus had to go on because of the situation in Texas, and that he would be in a position to demand your full share of everything if he took your place."

"Damned if I don't believe that's it," exploded Corrigan. "In fact, that's the only logical possibility in the whole mess. Who else on earth would have a motive for all this?"

"Except," Tom reminded him, "any one of numerous people who, for various reasons during the past years, have had good reason to hate George and myself, both individually and collectively."

Redfield sat down on the ground and shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"This makes a little thing like a pot shot at a racehorse seem mild," he said slowly.

"By the way, what's the dope on the industry of racing, the heath of Prince Regent and the present condition of our friend, Joe Painterfield?" Groody inquired.

SERVICE looked at him quickly. There was in Groody's ornate speech and hawk-like face the old spirit which he knew so well—which had been absent so long.

"Painterfield hasn't said a word yet," Redfield said.

He pushed his Panama hat, which he habitually wore with the brim turned down all the way round, back on his head.

"He's making a lot of tall promises about what he'll say," he went on, "but I guess he wants everybody from the mayor to the head of the Secret Service, to promise him that there's something in it for him if he talks."

The little horseman got to his feet.

"Well, I've got to move the Prince to the track this morning, so I'll have to be going," he continued. "By the way, I suppose that even if the colt comes up to the day of the race in the pink, that all

this trouble will keep you fellows from considering shooting your bank roll . . ."

"Not a bit of it," Groody assured him. "As far as I'm concerned, it adds a little pepper to the dish. You'll have the racetrack authorities warned, I suppose?"

"Say," Redfield said. "When the afternoon papers get on the streets of Cincinnati, that little stunt this morning will be on the front pages. From now until Saturday the Special will be one of the principal topics of conversation in this racehorse town, and that dirty work against a horse in it will be more important than a bomb at the White House."

"It's been some time," Groody told him, "since I've been in a racetrack town before a big race, but now that I think of it, I guess you're right."

"As a matter of fact," Service pointed out, "they did you a favor, as long as it failed. The world will be on guard now."

Buddy nodded. His round brown face was serious and his eyes had a curious brooding quality in them.

"They can't get to him from now on," he said absently. "But there's so much that can happen. Are you boys coming to the track this afternoon? I'll be circulating around the stables and might have a good bet."

"Are we?" Groody asked mockingly. "I'll say we are. Nothing like a little diversion, to say nothing of winning a little dough. Where'll we find you?"

"I'll meet you at the paddock about ten minutes before the first race. That's two o'clock."

"O. K. See you later."

He had barely left when the policeman returned. The officer was an immense fellow with wide shoulders and a face almost as Irish as Reilly's. He pounded toward the little group just as Reilly emerged from the hangar.

"I got it fixed, boys," the officer told them. "And I got some news besides."

"Yes? What?" demanded Corrigan.

"That guy Painterfield is out on bail already," the policeman puffed. "That means that he got twenty-five thousand dollars' worth, too. He's got some pals somewhere, that's a cinch, and if he's the kind of lad you said he was, Mr. Groody, he might keep his horns pulled in and then again he might not. Twenty-five thousand cash come in a package for him."

There was a moment of silence. Then Service said calmly:

"I had an idea that might happen. Private detectives'll be on his trail, and it may help us to have him free."

"When did you fix that?" Groody asked.

"While you were in the air," Tom replied.

Groody grinned at him.

"Old never-miss-a-trick Service," he said. "By the way, you might get your brain at work on how this circus is going to make out from now on. We've got to have another man for the stunt. Of course, Bob and I can tend to the night stuff ourselves for a couple of days—and I've been thinking about Delaney. We could probably get him and, as I remember it, he was a pretty fair pilot back in the War days."

"Sure, he's the man," Reilly broke in eagerly. "He seems like a nice feller and I been watchin' him land and take off. He can handle a ship."

"And he'd sure love the job," Corrigan added. "Suppose I fly over to that Thompson outfit and see if I can get him? I'll be back soon; we'll have some lunch, and then go to the track, eh?"

All of which was done with the result that former Lieutenant Delaney accepted the job with almost tearful gratitude, and accompanied the other flyers to the track. The big fellow was more than ever like a friendly dog, appreciating a pat on the back. He went with the other three and Buddy Redfield to dinner in Cincinnati, and then proceeded to a show by himself. Tom Service also stayed in town to hold important conversation with divers minions of the law, but Groody and Corrigan went back to the airdrome.

THE FIRST night flying show could be handled by Groody and Corrigan, inasmuch as it consisted merely of an acrobatic exhibition by the lighted planes. Later on in the week, Groody would perform with a phosphorous suit on, doing stunt stuff as he did in the daytime. The lanky flyer was himself again, and as he sent his ship spinning, looping and rolling through the cool night air above the fairy land which was Cincinnati and Covington, his eyes were glowing with the pure joy of the born airman in his native element. The two ships played around the sky like two monstrous golden dragon flies.

As Groody sent his ship toward the airdrome he had a feeling of vast content; that glorious stunt flight had quenched a thirst within him. Excitement lay ahead, and there was always the thought of the sublime gamble of the coming Saturday. Life seemed good to him as he taxied to the line.

There was a new policeman on duty and as Groody leaped from his ship, the officer, Reilly and Tom Service all walked rapidly toward him. In the wan glow of the specially placed arc lights, which provided light enough to land, he could see Service's face while that chunky young man was still several feet from him.

"How did you get out here?" Groody demanded, without preamble. "What's up?"

It seemed that each hair in Service's close clipped blond pompadour was electric with life. His eyes were as round and as bright as they became only when a climax was reached. When he spoke, though, it was with deceptive gentleness, as if to enjoy the more the effect of his words on the man who was himself again, and who would be thrilled by them.

"Two things, George," he said mildly. "In the first place, we found out that Delaney was sneaking around tonight and had a long conference with Kin Beaseley in the Gibson Hotel; and in the second place, Reilly just discovered that the rope you do that throw away stunt of yours on was tampered with. More than that, he swears it was all right this morning, and Sparrow Cantoni is one man in the world we know has *not* been within two miles of this field since he left!"

CHAPTER VII

"IT MEANS THEY GOT REILLY FOR WHAT HE KNEW"

FOR a moment Groody stood beside his ship like a statue. Bob Corrigan grunted in amazement. The policeman was puffing with excitement. Groody's eyes shifted to Reilly. The mechanic's face was a picture of woe.

"What had been done to the rope?" Groody asked him, as he took out the inevitable cigar.

"Come here, sor, and look for yourself," Reilly returned.

The heavy rope was coiled on the ground. For one feature of the performance of the Groody Circus, it was attached to the undercarriage. Its free end had a specially made loop in it, through which Groody thrust his leg while riding beneath the plane, the spectators being without knowledge of the fact that the rope was there. At the climax of that particular exhibition, Groody pretended to fall off the undercarriage. He fell a few feet before it became obvious to the crowd that there really was a rope, and he swung by it for the remainder of the flight. It never failed to make the crowd gasp.

"You see, sor," Reilly said, as he picked up the looped end of the rope. "'Twas cut right through, almost, and then the cut had been filled up with tar and stuff so that it wouldn't be noticed."

"How did you catch it?" Groody asked him.

"I was runnin' me fingers over every inch of it, and I thought she felt kind of funny right here," Reilly explained, "so I pulls and hauls at her, and picked away until I found out what was wrong."

For a moment the little group stood looking down at the cut.

"When was the last time you inspected this rope?" barked Corrigan.

"This mornin'," Reilly told him. "But I ain't sure that I would have caught it if it had been there. I wasn't so careful as I was this afternoon. Still in all, I don't believe she was there this mornin'."

"There have been exactly two minutes today when the hangar was without a guard," Service said evenly. "It don't seem possible that any outsider could have done anything today. It looks to me as though Sparrow had fixed both the ladder and the rope at the same time, in order to take no chances of his scheme going wrong."

"You can't tell me," the policeman said, "that any son of a gun ever got into this hangar today and done any dirty work."

Groody said nothing for a moment. It seemed to him that he was on the verge of a discovery which persistently eluded him—that there was a clue which he could not quite touch. Instinctively he felt that a tenable theory for what was happening was right around the corner. Of course, little Sparrow Cantoni was a logical suspect, but somehow, he was not so sure now that Cantoni was the only one concerned.

"What's this about Delaney?" he demanded finally.

"That's all there is to it," Service told him. "Private detectives are watching Beaseley, you know, planted by the Jockey Club on Redfield's complaint, and Delaney spent a couple of hours with him, and took great measures, besides, to avoid being discovered."

" 'What do you make of that, Watson'?"

"How much does he know about this horserace stuff?"

"He was there, of course," Groody said, "and he saw the Kin Beaseley-Buddy Redfield scrap. Old Beaseley has got Buddy's goat, that's a cinch, and Buddy blew up the minute Beaseley hove over the horizon. Delaney knows he's a crook and that he hates Redfield—"

"Which makes it look very peculiar," Service finished for him, "to have our employee and your supposed friend sneaking around for consultations with a man we suspect of trying to tamper with our horse."

"I don't see what he could be up to," Corrigan said, walking up and down nervously. "Unless he wants all angles on the race to make a sure thing bet."

"We'll find out what he's up to," Service said calmly. "We're in luck to have him show his hand this early in the game—if he has a hand to show."

Groody's mouth widened in that one sided grin which always seemed to express a sort of quizzical self-mockery.

"I'm going to wake up one of these days," he said, "and find out that this is a dream. It's the most cuckoo layout I ever saw. Here we are, surrounded by police, going about our own business, and we stand here in Covington, Kentucky, figuring calmly that somebody is trying to murder me; and take it for granted that a horserace is going to be fixed in front of about fifty thousand people! If our imaginations don't make Nick Carter sound like a Sunday school boy, I'm the Pope."

"You read the papers, don't you?" smiled Service. "Well, n-not a week goes b-by without something coming out to show that there's plenty gotten away with in this great and gl-glorious country."

"I'll say," said the policeman.

"Well," Groody said, "we're all going to see Buddy at the track tomorrow morning, aren't we? Even Delaney said he'd be out. We'd better put Buddy wise the first thing. It looks to me as though flying and horseracing were being more and more closely bound up together."

Service nodded.

"I wish I could figure out some sensible reason for the same bunch being behind the tampering with Prince Regent and the destruction of George Groody," he said, "b-but I can't. We just added another enemy by becoming interested in Prince Regent, that's all."

"I guess you're right," Groody admitted. "Well, I'm going to bed. I've had a tough day."

"How do you feel?" Corrigan asked.

"O. K," grinned Groody. "As long as we keep our eyes open they can't get away with anything, and as long as nothing goes wrong in the air, I guess we can give as good as we take on the ground."

The policeman was left at the hangar and the weary airmen went to their hotel.

GROODY was up at 4:30 to get to the track for the workouts. Service and Corrigan accompanied him for a sight of Prince Regent. The morning mist was still heavy over the track as they walked up the line of stables toward Prince Regent's stall. Shadowy thoroughbreds were galloping around the track, and dozens of clockers huddled silently on the fences. Grooms, trainers, exercise boys and jockeys were busy, as the most crowded period in a racetrack day got under way.

"They've sure got a crowd," Groody remarked. "Must be a hundred men watching these gallops."

"They're out to spot these crack horses that are here for the Special, probably," Corrigan suggested, which supposition Buddy Redfield confirmed when they found him.

He was saddling Prince Regent, preparatory to the colt's morning gallop. Two Spot Jackson, a bandage across his back bulging his faded sweater, seemed to be himself. Prince Regent was nipping at him playfully as Buddy tightened the girths, and Two Spot was delivering a lecture to the animal, which was the second dearest thing in his life.

"Look heah, you mornin' glory," Two Spot was saying affectionately. "You cain't get round me nippin' me thataway. You is gwine to wurk dis mornin', don' forget. Why, you ol' piece o' crow bait, you ain't gone faster'n a trot fo' so long that you is hog fat. Cain't do a mile in two minutes. You's gwine to run dis mornin', or Ah's jus' gwine to whip hell out o' you."

"The hell you say," Redfield chuckled. "If you let those wise guys along that rail have any idea how fast the Prince can run, there's going to be a dead darky on this track."

He turned to the flyers, who were standing some distance away to avoid frightening Prince Regent.

"It will be just an easy gallop," he explained, "but I thought you'd want to see him really run to find out whether he favors the leg or not; and it may be interesting to you to see some of these stake horses go. Cruiser Man, about the best horse the East has put out this season, is scheduled for a real mile, I understand."

The portly trainer gave Two Spot a leg-up and the little negro took Prince Regent out on the track. The clockers' eyes left the two other horses that were running easily around the oval and concentrated on the beautiful black. Two Spot was pouring an unending stream of talk into his horse's ear, and Prince Regent had one ear cocked back as if to listen. Finally Two Spot broke him into an easy gallop to warm him up.

"Two Spot and the Prince certainly do get along, don't they?" Groody remarked.

Redfield nodded.

"He's half of Prince Regent," he said. "And that little coon has shown the world two of the greatest rides the track ever saw, right on Prince Regent's back, too."

"It strikes me you'd better be pretty careful what Two Spot does with his evenings," Service said. "The colt wouldn't stand a chance in any race without him, would he?"

Buddy shook his head.

"No. Prince Regent's scared of any other rider and won't work a lick," he said. "But I'm going to put Farmer Dane on him Wednesday. The Prince just tolerates him."

"Why not Two Spot?" Corrigan asked him. "Boy, look at the colt go!"

Redfield's eyes shifted to his horse. Prince Regent was galloping on the other side of the track, but even at that distance, the matchless smoothness and gigantic strides which had made him the

horse he was, could be easily discerned.

"I won't want Two Spot to ride for two reasons," Redfield explained. "In the first place, I don't want to take any chance of anything happening to him. In the second, I don't give a damn about winning; in fact, I'd rather not. There'll be four or five of the Special horses in it, for a tightener, and there's no use of knocking the odds down. We won't rook the public, either. Every one on the track knows that Prince Regent is a poor bet, even when he's in good shape, without Two Spot Jackson riding him, and the papers will put that little item before the public."

The track was filling with horses. Groody had in his Western blood even more than the ordinary man's love for a good horse, and his narrow gray eyes were shining as one equine aristocrat after another pranced out on the track. Their coats shone in the sun, and in every line of their slim legs and glossy bodies there was the mark of the thoroughbred. It needed no one to tell him that at least half of those horses were of the blood royal.

Standing out above them all, though, was Prince Regent. He was thundering down the back stretch now toward them, running well within himself. Nevertheless, he seemed like a black meteor as he flashed by. Two Spot, low over his neck, had a good hold on his horse, and the two of them gave the effect of transcendent joy in their work.

"I'm damned if that horse hasn't got what you'd call personality in a human being," Corrigan said. "This is the first time I've lamped him, and I'd rather own him than any animal I've ever seen."

Redfield's eyes glowed. The little horseman would rather have heard that than any compliment which could have been paid to himself.

"His leg's as good as it ever was right now," he ruminated aloud. "If he's like this Saturday, he'll line up for the Special, boys, the best horse in that race, so help me!"

"Hello! H-here comes Delaney," Service said.

The shabby flyer had just turned the corner of the stable and was coming toward them.

"Listen, Buddy," Groody said quickly. "We found out that Delaney's having private conferences with your friend, Kin Beaseley."

"Yes?" Redfield questioned.

"Just what do you think could possibly be done here on the track, by Beaseley or anybody else?" Corrigan demanded.

"Plenty can happen right on a city street corner, can't it?" Buddy countered.

"You believe that Beaseley's out to get you just for revenge?" Service asked him. "Or that he's into some money making scheme?"

"A combination of both, maybe," Redfield said. "He'd give his left arm to lose me my horse, and if he can make money besides, that would make it perfect for him. If you knew him as well as I do, and knew the track as well as I know it, you wouldn't be thinking what you're thinking now, which is that I'm just a damn' fool, afraid of all kinds of things like some nervous old woman."

"Good morning," piped Delaney.

HE WAS unshaven and looked as if he had not stopped even to comb his hair. He looked more like one of the tousled stable attachés than a former Army officer and flyer.

"How's everything?" Delaney went on. "The horse and Two Spot O. K?"

Redfield nodded. He was studying the stalwart airman with troubled eyes.

"I ran into Sparrow Cantoni on the way here," Delaney went on. "He told me he was on his way to try and get my job with the Thompson outfit."

"Oh-ho!" exclaimed Groody. "How was he feeling?"

"Not so good," Delaney said shortly.

Groody looked at Service. For some reason, the thought of the little Italian bothered him. If, by any chance, an injustice had been done him . . .

"Listen, boys," Delaney said, "I've got a little setup that might help us all. That black is Prince Regent, ain't it? Sure is a horse."

The Prince was moving at a mere hand gallop now, as Two Spot slowed him down preparatory to bringing him in.

"What's on your mind," Groody asked.

Delaney looked around the group with bright eyes, as though asking for approbation.

"I had a chance to meet Kin Beaseley," Delaney said, "and I kind of cultivated him. Thought maybe if he was up to something like Redfield here seems to figure, maybe if I got friendly with him I could get the dope, see? So I goes to him last night and says that I'm broke, got an airplane, and thought maybe I could help him out. He asks why, and I just hinted around that I was game for any job and that if he or anybody he knew had occasion to get out of here, and get out of here fast, an airplane was the best way of doing it, see? Mentioned this shooting thing yesterday morning, and just let on that I was game for a little stuff against the law if the price was right."

"You hinted that you believed he was behind the shooting yesterday?" Service asked gently.

Delaney nodded.

"What did you find out?" Redfield asked.

"Not a thing," Delaney admitted. "Claimed he didn't know anything about it and all that, but from the way he acted, I think he may use me for something. I believe he's got something up his sleeve and that he needs a man he can trust. That airplane gag didn't lay flat, either. Won't be so tough on us to have a spy in the enemy's camp, will it?"

"I should say not," Groody told him. "That sounds pretty good. We can get some excuse for you to have it in for us before the week's out, pretend to fire you or something like that."

"Does he know you're working for us now?" Corrigan demanded.

"Yes," Delaney answered. "But I hinted I was just in with you to make a few dollars, and that I could get all the dope on Prince Regent from Redfield and help him out quite a little."

"Was he interested in Prince Regent?" Buddy asked.

"He seemed to be," Delaney answered. "But he's such a cold proposition, it was hard to tell. He wanted me to get all the dope and give it to him, though."

Groody was studying the flyer thoughtfully. That annoying feeling of being just around the corner from an important discovery still bothered him. He felt that there was one magic fact which would unravel the tangled skein that was enmeshing the Groody Circus and the Redfield Stable, but he could not get his finger on it. Now that it appeared that Delaney was absolutely on the level, he was more bewildered than ever. Then, suddenly, what he had been groping for came to him, and in a few seconds his racing mind had outlined a course of action. He trusted Delaney now; nevertheless, he did not care to mention what was on his mind in the gypsy pilot's presence.

The entire track was taking on an air of life as Prince Regent, his perspiration showing his excellent condition, pranced down the road toward his stable. Across the garden-like infield, the great green stands were alive with men who were cleaning them. A dozen horses were on the track, and the spectators had increased in number. Track attachés were running about busily; and around the stables, dozens of horsemen were engaged in everything from walking horses around to rubbing them down. Famous jockeys, dressed in sweaters and caps, were working out their employers' horses one by one. Groups of trainers were clocking the workouts with impassive faces. The smell of cooking came from various stables and here and there whole strings of horses were being paraded about by stable boys. It was a combination of romance and realism which expressed the two sides of the most fascinating sport in the world, to Groody.

"I HATE to tear myself away," he said suddenly. "But I think we'd better be going, Tom. I have a couple of things I'd like to do, and a few things I'd like to say to you without delay."

"How do you feel about the horse?" Redfield asked them as he walked over to relieve Two Spot of the task of drying Prince Regent out.

"I don't think we've changed our minds, have we?" Corrigan asked the others.

"Shoot the thirty thousand—or thirty-three, to be exact—if everything's O. K. Saturday," Groody said.

Service nodded.

Redfield looked at them silently for a moment.

"If I take the money," he said quietly, "I don't think you'll regret it."

"If we didn't think that way," Groody told him, "you wouldn't get it; so forget it. See you this afternoon."

Redfield nodded, his round face lighted with a smile.

"I'll be a nervous wreck before Saturday," he said. "Groody, if I was you, I'd be in the bughouse by now."

Delaney accompanied the other flyers to breakfast, so Groody had no opportunity to talk with Service until they had reached the field. Somehow, he half dreaded, half anticipated amazing news from Reilly, and he was aware of a slight feeling of disappointment when they found that everything was serene.

"It don't seem natural," he commented. "I expected to find the ships burned up or you dead, Reilly. The boys are losing their punch. Delaney, you'd better go up with Bob in the Hawk and get wise to the ship."

"I was going to suggest that," Delaney nodded. "I can fly these babies all right, though."

"You won't have any flying tonight," Groody told him. "But this morning the schedule calls for a transfer from one wing to a wing skid of the other plane. All you've got to do is fly straight and level, but you want to be sure to do that. I wear a parachute to make a jump, so there wouldn't be a lot of harm done if anything went wrong, but it might as well go right."

After Delaney and Corrigan had taken off, Groody called Reilly from the hangar and, in a few words, imparted what he had in mind to Tom and the mechanic. Reilly's face was a study while the flyer was talking, and Service nodded from time to time.

"Possible," he said finally, "but damned improbable. Y-you can't figure m-murder without a very strong m-motive, and Cantoni has got it. We can t-try, though, as you say. In fact, I'll start right n-now."

"That's what Oi think," Reilly said. "Listen, Lieutenant, Oi've got an idea of me own that Oi'm woikin' on. Oi ain't sayin' nothin', but Oi been thinking things over and Oi may have some news in a day or two. Damned if Oi don't believe Oi'm right, too; and it's somethin' along the line o' what you was sayin'."

"Why so mysterious?" Groody demanded.

The troubled Irishman shook his head doggedly.

"Oi don't like to talk on a thing like this unless Oi'm sure. Leave it to me, boss, please. Oi don't want to get nobody in bad or spoil anything unless Oi'm sure."

Service took off his glasses, his eyes probing the Irishman's.

"You sound to me," he said, "as if you had something up your sleeve that was enough to send somebody to jail right now."

"That's it," mumbled Reilly, "and maybe for a long time, too. Oi ain't goin' to do it until Oi'm sure, and Oi got a way of makin' sure. Oi think if Oi'm wrong, Oi ain't gonna ever tell you."

The three men separated and Groody did not see Tom again until the races that afternoon. The morning flying had gone off without a hitch and at two o'clock the entire personnel of the Groody Circus was at the track, including Reilly. Service reported that he had taken all steps possible to ascertain the truth or falsity of Groody's sudden hunch, and thereafter

they devoted themselves exclusively to the winning of a few dollars on Redfield's tips. After the last race Redfield and Delaney accompanied them to dinner, but Reilly left directly for the field. Dinner over, the whole group went out to the airdrome at 9:30. They had no sooner disembarked from their taxi than the policeman was walking toward them from the shelter of the hangar.

"You're a fine bunch," he fumed. "Where's this guy Reilly? I ain't had no supper because I couldn't leave."

"What?" snapped Groody. "Reilly hasn't been here?"

"Hell, no!" returned the policeman.

The flyers looked at each other in amazement.

"Then there's one thing certain," Service said finally. "And that is that something's happened to him. I'll start telephoning right now."

Groody and Corrigan were forced to take the air immediately for a short exhibition, and when they returned, Service was waiting for them.

"What's the news?" Groody asked, as he got out of his ship.

"The news," Service said crisply, "is that Reilly can't be located anywhere. Nobody's seen him, but there was this note at the hotel for us, written on a typewriter. All it says is—'Don't bother to look for Reilly'!"

The eyes of the two men were locked for a moment. Then—

"Good Lord," Groody said slowly. "That means—"

"It means just one thing," Service interrupted in the clipped phrases which meant that he was on a trail. "It means that Reilly did know something, or find out something, and that the ones he had the dope on got rid of him!"

TOM SERVICE got no sleep at all that night, and the flyers very little. Their efforts, however, plus the cooperation of the police of Covington and Cincinnati, had borne no fruit whatever by race-time the next day. Not a single trace of the missing Irishman had been found. None of his effects were missing from his room, which looked as if his departure had not been voluntary; but so far as the police could learn he had been seen with no one.

As Groody rode to the track that afternoon he was reading his seventh newspaper that day. The apparent abduction of Reilly had provided the final ingredient necessary to make the story a national feature, and for the first time that week all the details of the case were published. Groody found his name staring at him from the headlines of every newspaper in town.

The connection of the Groody Flyers with the Redfield Stable was also touched upon in most of the stories, and the attempted shooting of Prince Regent was called to the public's attention, along with the mysterious happenings surrounding the flying circus.

As Groody turned the pages of his newspaper, he stopped at the editorial page. "It Seems Like Chicago" was the title of the leading editorial, and Groody read it with a grim smile on his face.

It was an expression of amazement and resentment at the situation in which the forces of the law found themselves. Groody's eyes rested longest on the last paragraph.

> And so the city of Cincinnati finds itself in the astounding position of apparently being unable to protect the interests of a group of young men who are visiting us. In another part of this paper Mr. Redfield is quoted as saying calmly that he fully anticipates an illegal attempt to damage the chances of Prince Regent, his famous horse, in the National Special. This is said in the full knowledge that all the resources of the Kentucky Jockey Club and the Cincinnati police department will be used to thwart foul play. It is up to Cincinnati to prove Mr. Redfield wrong!

As Groody climbed off the street car at the entrance of the track, he was grinning mockingly.

"Well, well," he told himself. "It looks as though we'd shaken up this town some, at that."

TO BE CONTINUED

NORSE TREASURE *In* NOVA SCOTIA

An Article of the Epic Rovers of Uncharted Seas

By ALLEN WILLEY

THE FACTS in this story of buried treasure are so dramatically interesting that they seem almost fictional, yet we may safely and reasonably believe that they tell of the first pirate treasure ever buried in the western world—for it was a real pirate hoard, the spoils of bold viking sea rovers. Some of this tale is modern history, dating back only some hundred and thirty years, while another and extremely interesting part is made up of legendary and semi-historical data preserved in Icelandic sagas or prose writings. Such a small and ice bound little island as Iceland may seem a very poor place to look for facts. Nevertheless, in accuracy, Iceland's literature for several hundred years after 1000 A.D. equaled if not surpassed that of Europe. That literature covers the earlier period of this story.

With the coast of Greenland only some three hundred miles distant, it can not even be supposed that daring and hardy Iceland sailors who coursed the sea in many directions, even to the Mediterranean, were not familiar with the coastline of America far to the south.

II

WE MAY commence this story with Iceland in the year 1010 or thereabouts, when the third great exploring expedition left that island, sailing south; or we may start with the three young trappers who in 1795 landed from their boat at Smith's Cove, Oak Island—an island of some two hundred and fifty acres in extent in Mahone Bay

on the eastern shore of Nova Scotia—within sight of the present summer resort town of Chester, and no great distance from Halifax. I rather prefer to start with the three young trappers, Anthony Vaughan, Daniel McInnies and John Smith, England born lads who had come to the western world in search of all that a new country offered.

It seems a little more dramatic to me to find the treasure cache before describing how it came there, for after you have read of the futile and exciting attempts to get it during a period of a century and a quarter, you will be more interested to know how it happened to get there, and who planted it in the very bowels of Oak Island.

Going ashore, the three men, all experienced in woodcraft, began to look for signs of the animals they hoped to trap there. In their search they soon came to some oak trees. One giant tree thrust forth from its butt a huge limb decayed by age, which had evidently been sawed off some feet from where it joined the tree trunk. From this armlike branch hung the most peculiar antique ship's block they had ever seen.

Here I want to stop just long enough to throw one monkeywrench into the gearing of this story, for it is the only improbable spot in it. Could a ship's block have stood the wear and tear of the elements for some four hundred years? Still, these three men certainly did find it hanging there. And that was what led to over a hundred years' search for the treasure; for directly beneath the overhanging block they noted a circular depression in the ground, grass grown, but in its circular shape and depression plainly indicating that it represented where a pit had been dug. Thus the hanging block told its own reason for being there.

THOSE were the days when the tales of buried pirate treasure were household themes and stories on the tongues of all. Smith, Vaughan and McInnies believed that they had found something better than a trapping ground, and went back to their boat for a shovel, brought with them in case they should need it to dig into some animal's burrow. With this they went to work. All day they dug by turns, until at a depth of ten feet they encountered a heavy flooring of oak. It was late in the afternoon and they called it a day's work and departed with high hopes of what the morrow would bring forth, when with more suitable tools they could lift the oaken floor.

Next day bright and early they resumed work. They removed the oak planks which were about six inches thick and covered a space some five feet square. No pirate gold rewarded their gaze as the planks were lifted. They dug on. Again at the next ten feet they struck another layer of the oak planking. It became necessary to employ blocks and buckets to clear the débris from the pit. When they got down thirty feet, they encountered another flooring. The season was getting late, the ground freezing fast, and more tackle needed, so they decided to lay off until spring and then return properly equipped. That winter they explored the island thoroughly. They found that the tree stood exactly three hundred and sixty-five feet from high water mark. Did the fact that the distance in feet equaled exactly the number of days in a year signify anything? Next they discovered that from the pit to high water mark a little below the surface of the ground a gravel-like pavement had been laid. Investigation in later years showed that this paving represented the top of a crude engineering plan connecting the pit with the sea.

It began to dawn on the minds of the young men that their find represented something more than a mere pirate pit, dug to conceal a few chests of plunder. They decided that the job was beyond their individual efforts and they spent the rest of the winter endeavoring to secure capital and form a company. It was seven years before they were able to do this and resume work, but long before

this they had secured a legal title to the island.

A young doctor, Lynds by name, of Truro, headed the company and some Halifax men put in money. In 1802 they went at the work with machinery, recognizing that it was really an engineering job, but little thinking that they were digging into the first white man's civilization on the American continent—a civilization which had left it fully a hundred years before Columbus had discovered it.

The work was commenced by the company at the thirty foot level, where Smith, McInnies and Vaughan had left off, and proceeded rapidly to a depth of ninety-five feet, oak planking being found every ten feet. At ninety-five feet a most peculiar and astonishing find was made, causing them much speculation as to its character and the reason for its presence there. It was a flat stone three feet long, eighteen inches wide, polished on the face and on this smooth surface was deeply cut strange and undecipherable characters which Dr. Lynds declared were runic inscriptions. What became of this priceless link in the history of America's pre-Columbus period, no one now knows. Various stories were current regarding the stone many years ago. One was that it was kicked about the island unnoticed and unvalued for some years until built into a fireplace in a house which John Smith—one of the three trappers—erected and which later burned down. Another was that it was taken to Halifax where learned men in anthropology, geology, history and hieroglyphics studied it unavailingly, the carvings on it being beyond their ken. The stone is said later to have graced a museum, but now only these stories remain. The stone has long ago disappeared and with it what priceless history, for I believe that the savants of today would easily decipher those hieroglyphics which undoubtedly were Celtic runics, telling what to do when the stone was reached, as well as who put it there.

AFTER this strange slab of stone had been removed, soundings were made with a long iron bar and five feet deeper the oak plankings were again touched, the tenth platform encountered. It was late Saturday afternoon, so the work was discontinued for the day. On Monday when the workmen arrived at the pit, disaster stared them in the face. The pit was nearly level full of water!

Up to this time the digging had simply represented the removal of earth, and every ten feet an oak platform, but now, had they known it—but they did not—they were fighting the Atlantic Ocean and the protective scheme of an ancient Norse engineer, who had arranged a plan by which only those who knew the secret could reach the hidden treasure, a feat which has kept the Oak Island treasure seekers guessing and fretting for a century and a quarter.

Undiscouraged at first by the water, the workers bailed furiously all day, yet found on ceasing their labors at sundown that the water had receded hardly an inch. It looked as if they had reached an impasse. After some deliberation it was decided to sink a second shaft some feet back of the flooded pit and tunnel from it to the pit. This was done, and at a depth of one hundred and ten feet they started a horizontal shaft toward the flooded one, but just before they had reached it, the wall of earth between slumped, the water rushed in and the workmen barely escaped with their lives. Thus ended the first organized attempt to recover the Oak Island treasure, for the company then and there gave up the fight. Strange as it may appear, none of them had taken the trouble to taste the water in the pit and it was not known for a long time that the water flowed in from the ocean.

Nothing more was done toward seeking the treasure until almost half a century had passed, but in 1848 a company was again formed. Smith and McInnies of the original company had died, but Vaughan, now an old man, and Dr.

Lynds interested capital in a second attempt and directed the work in an advisory capacity. This second company sank a shaft just south of the first flooded pit, but at about ninety feet the water again rushed in and again the work ceased. About this time, came one McCully from Truro, with an idea and a drill such as drillers for coal used in those days. He mounted his drill on a platform some thirty feet below the surface and sent it down. Seventy feet farther, or one hundred feet from the surface, the drill struck the wooden platform reached and felt by the first company on that momentous Saturday in 1802 when the sea water for the first time rushed in. Borings from this layer of wood showed it to be five inches thick.

Having now gone deeper than any previous effort, a very close watch was kept on the drill and just below the flooring at a hundred feet, the drill again showed wood and pierced through four inches of oak and commenced an erratic wiggling through two feet of something that acted like loose pieces of metal and then again struck four inches of oak. This action of the drill plainly indicated to the excited watchers that below the platform at a hundred feet, the auger had passed through a box or chest of four inch oak, two feet deep and containing pieces of metal—gold of course; what else would be so carefully buried? When the drill was drawn up it was carefully and eagerly inspected, and several very small pieces of gold, evidently links of a chain, were found clinging to the auger.

Can you picture the excitement that seized those treasure seekers as they realized that down there in that flooded pit there really was treasure—how vast they could not even guess—and then the sickening thought that in all probability they could never get it? But again the drill was sent down, and below the first box it went through another and then six feet through clay, evidencing that probably there were no boxes buried deeper and that the chests were placed one on top of the other.

At once another boring was made near by. At a hundred feet the platform was again struck, then a few feet of clay and then the drill struck something which seemed to shunt it to one side as if the object bulged. They thought it was a heavy cask. Water again came into the drill boring and it became evident that it was beyond their power to stop it, and again the effort to secure the Oak Island treasure was abandoned.

The following year another attempt was made, and then again in 1863. After this, thirty years elapsed before the treasure seeking bug bit the sixth optimistic gold hunters in 1893. They were not only bit; they were stung. Four years later search was made again, and then no one cared to tackle the job for twenty-three years. In 1920, the last attempt was made. During all these years of hungry search, shafts were sunk all around the original Smith-Vaughan-McInnies pit and when the same was approached by tunnels the water always rushed in.

IT SEEMS strange, uncanny even, that engineers in the past years could not stop the inflow of water from the ocean and then pump out the treasure bearing pit, for a systematic survey of the section leading from the beach to the first pit dug —three hundred and sixty-five feet—disclosed that the beach had been rebuilt centuries ago opposite the pit and on it a V shaped stone extension carried a considerable distance, the center drawn in and sloped, and a stone tunnel built sloping to the hundred foot level where the borings had indicated the presence of buried chests. This sea water tunnel had in some way been tapped by the first company of excavators and hence every subsequent digging on reaching or opening into the original pit became flooded from it.

In 1893 a drill was sent down a hundred and fifty feet, passing through somewhat above this depth what appeared to be a layer of cement, and then through planking and at once the bit began to revolve

very erratically, as if boring in some springy, leathery substance. The auger was brought up carefully and cleaned with the greatest thoroughness, every substance on it screened and examined under microscope. One piece of something about the size of a pea, when unrolled, dried and spread out, proved to be parchment. It had been written on, evidently with a black, tarlike fluid. But this little piece of skin showed only two or three unrecognizable characters. It told no tale.

That is all we seem to know about the Oak Island treasure and this Oak Island mystery up to the present time. It is queer business, and it is all the more puzzling because everything thus far stated is pure, unadulterated fact—no guessing, and not a word of fiction or imagination. Just cold facts! As to what I am about to write of how the treasure came there, you will have to rely on the truth and accuracy of Icelandic sagas, and these sagas are in most cases pretty good history—although all history, if you go back far enough, is legendary, word of mouth stories as they are told and retold, and finally written down. Well, you know no two men can tell a story of an event and tell it exactly alike.

III

SOME time before 900 A.D. emigrants from Norway sailed to Iceland. As the years passed others came until the island had a population so large that settlements in new lands became imperative. In 932 Icelanders made settlements in Greenland and not long after were voyaging down the American coast and in 1001 Leif Ericson spent a year in Massachusetts.

Icelandic sagas record three major expeditions to the south. The last of these, probably in 1007, was made in three ships, carrying a hundred and sixty men and some women, with live stock and provisions. This was not long after Lief Ericson's return with glowing accounts of Vineland, as he called the southland.

Of these three vessels, the one commanded by Thorvard who had married Freydis, daughter of Eric the Red, a famous viking, and who is described as the most intelligent and beautiful woman in Iceland at that time, sailed with her husband. There were also five other women and fifty men as a crew. In a storm off Newfoundland the three ships became separated. The navigator of Thorvard's vessel was a Norseman who had not accepted the Christian belief, but still clung to the old Norse gods. He was the only pagan in the expedition. The other two ships after the storm, returned to Greenland, declaring that Thorvard and his crew had been lost owing to their pilot's heathenism. But the old pagan navigator weathered the storm and kept on south and in time reached what is now Nova Scotia. Skirting the coast, a large and beautiful bay, with delightful country about it—it was Mahone Bay—greeted their view and lured them in to cast anchor. Here they disembarked and decided to remain and colonize the land.

It seems rather singular that we find fairly authentic history of these beginnings of Norse settlement on the American continent, but very little indeed about the end of their stay, which covered a period of several hundred years. So along here in this story we shall have to do a little putting two and two together and possibly, making five instead of four from it. But it is pretty probable that Thorvard settled on the shores of Mahone Bay, calling it Freydisvic (*vic* is Norse for bay) and established a village, which like the bay, was honored by his beautiful wife's name and called Freydisborg. The little colony throve amazingly and the unmarried men took wives from the Skrelling maidens—Indians—and as the wife taking was mostly on the Sabine order, relations between the Skrellings and Norsemen became in time quite strained.

IN A FEW years Thorfinn, Thorvard's pagan navigator, gripped by the ever impelling wanderlust, built a larger and better ship than their original craft and

with a score or more of hardy fellows sailed south. In time he returned to tell wonderful tales of the rich, warm country far to the south that he had visited, where man could live without labor, and he brought with him too, the lure of all ages—gold! Still Thorfinn's stories and the gold he had brought did not entice Thorvard to leave the new settlement for the wonders of the south. During Thorfinn's lifetime other voyages were made to the southward and several across to Norway from whence more colonists were brought. But with Greenland they held no intercourse, for there was a feeling of deep resentment against their former neighbors and friends who had deserted them after the epochal storm.

Thus the years rolled by, one, two, three hundred, since the settlement of Thorvardland. A large population occupied the land, with Freydisborg the capital city. Probably the country would have been much more densely peopled had it not been for the frequent epidemics of smallpox and pneumonia, together with losses by war with the Skrellings and the many men lost at sea, for these Norsemen from Thorvardland were continually on the sea seeking gain. The direct descendants of old Thorfinn the pagan still worshiped Thor and Odin, for Christianity was not obligatory, and every summer they sailed south, for they were viking pirates and they loved too, to overhaul a Greenland Norseman and strip him of his all, irrespective of common ancestry and remote kinship.

IN THE last years of the 1300's Thoral Thorvardson, a direct descendant of Thorvard I, as we might call him, ruled in Thorvardland. The people by the intermingling of Indian blood were less Scandinavian in thought and appearance, but they were a piratical race and the land a piratical Eden, their ships bringing home treasure in gold and silver with every voyage.

We naturally associate pirate plunder with gold and silver coins and bullion and precious gems, but the Thorvardian pirates could have found, in their day, no rich ships to rob, and hence must have gathered their treasure as did Morgan and other later pirates by land operations and the looting of the southern natives. So perhaps Cortes and Pizarro were not the first white men to despoil the innocent natives of the south. As this wealth in precious metal increased, it naturally was stored away. It had its recognized value, but not its uses, for there was no place to spend it. It could not get out of the country because there was no trade. Hence, the gold and silver that came to Thorvardland, remained there. In three hundred years a very large amount must have accumulated, that is, if those old Norsemen were good hustlers.

It must have been about a hundred years prior to Columbus's first voyage to the western world that the final chapter of Norse habitation in America was written. There had been three successive years of unremitting scourge by smallpox and pneumonia, which had decimated the once numerous population of Thorvardland to a pitiable few hundred. The Skrellings, recognizing the helplessness of their age old foes, fell upon them and wiped out those on the frontiers and all who had not taken shelter in Freydisborg, and even those in the town realized that it could not be defended against the Indians. It was the death knell of the American Norsemen. Gathering together the remnant of the living and every scrap of treasure that had been accumulated in the many years of piracy, the people—but a sad little remnant of the once populous land—crossed over from the mainland to Oak Island, for it could be defended even by their little band from the Skrellings, and prepared for the final move.

Thorval Thorvardson, now an old man, still ruled over this pitiful handful of discouraged, fright ridden men and women, the last of his once populous land; but his sway was now far more fatherly than kingly. He must have been a man of considerable ability as a builder and engineer,

for the treasure pit and tunnel to the sea was his idea, and he took all the time necessary to build it as he intended to have it, safely to keep its holdings until such time as those who had right to the treasure and the knowledge of how to reach it, should come to recover it. For Thorvardson meant that some day his people, strengthened by new colonists, should come back and that Thorvardland should not revert to Skrelling territory.

IT MUST have taken many months with the small number of laborers available, to dig the deep shaft, reconstruct the beach and devise and make the slanting stone tunnel and its water gates, and it must have required considerable engineering ability to work out the plan by which a few supporting columns in the main pit, would, when removed—as they would be by diggers unacquainted with his plan—automatically throw open the water gates of the tunnel to the sea and let in the ocean to flood the pit.

Then the stout oak chests were constructed and filled with the treasure and no doubt a written record of what the Norsemen had done since they landed at Mahone Bay over three hundred years before, and were committed to the depths of the shaft, the great branch of the oak tree which extended over it being used to sustain the tackle with which the chests were lowered.

Then as the pit was filled with earth, at every ten feet the heavy oak plankings were placed, not only to mark the pit for future digging, but to support the smaller uprights which were the key to Thorwardson's scheme for flooding it. How well the old Norseman planned, the treasure seekers of a later day have discovered to their sorrow.

At last the treasure and records buried, the shaft filled up, the ground smoothed of all débris and the top of the pit turfed over, there was no more to do except to bid farewell to a land they had learned to love. With carefully drawn plans of the treasure pit and its flooding secret, a map of the island and the adjacent land and water, and such riches as the little company of survivors cared to take with them, the remnant of the thousands who had once occupied a land which a few hundred years later the French named Acadia—a land which must have been a real Acadia to those frost bitten men of the far north—prepared to set sail for Norway.

Setting fire to everything, they sailed away from the burning village on Oak Island, and the burning boats in the harbor, out on the vast, gale swept Atlantic and it swallowed them up and gave back no message.

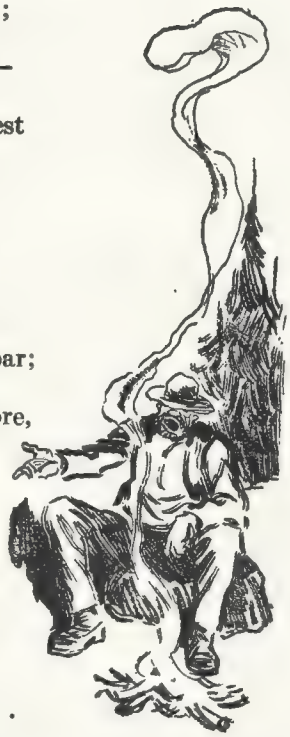
Perhaps in Valhalla they now sit, surrounded by the other vikings who found their way from shrieking tempest and surging billows to the old Norseman's heroic halls of fame.

The BALLAD of TRAIPSIN' DAN

by C. WILES HALLOCK

NOW, Traipsin' Dan was a rovin' man
An' a roamer, wild an' free.
He rammed around with a yen profound
For to see what he might see.
Oh, he roved by day an' he raved by night;
For his pride an' joy was a roarin' fight,
An' a long spun yarn was his fond delight—
An' his fav'rite word was Me . . .
Most yarn spinnin'est—most fight winnin'est
Man in th' world was he . . .
An' his fav'rite word was Me.

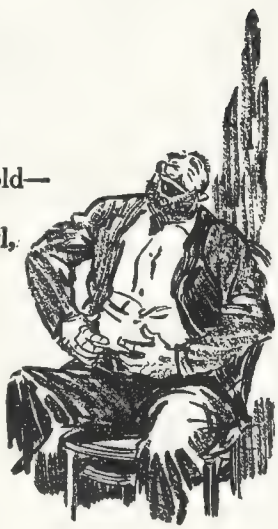
Now, Traipsin' Dan was a pond'rous man,
An' he made a mighty show.
He forged ahead with a heavy tread,
An' he traipsed both to an' fro . . .
An' his voice boomed out with a mighty roar;
An' he stood up tall, more'n six foot-four;
An' he would of stood mebbe two inch' more,
But his brow was vurry low . . .
Most supremius, durned blasphemius
Man that I ever know . . .
An' his brow was vurry low.



Oh, he traveled east an' he traveled west,
With a loud, wide open trap.
An' he took long trips o'er th' sea in ships,
For to roam all round th' map.
In a Yukon camp . . . off to Hindustan . . .
On a tramp ship cruise . . . with a caravan—
He would have his row; he would choose his man . . .
Oh, he roamed from scrap to scrap.

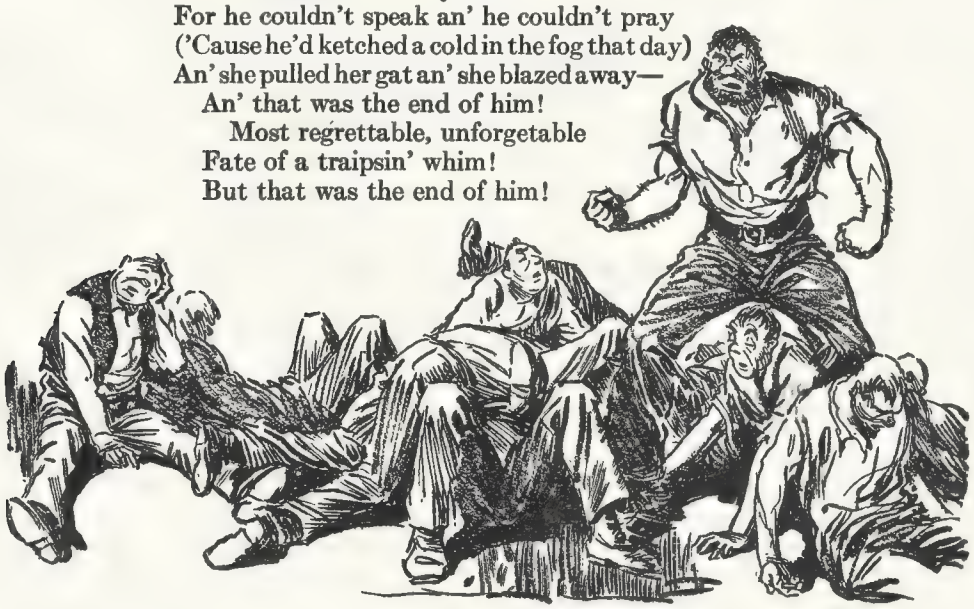
Most unkeerfulest, plumb unfearfulest
Far gallivantin' yap . . .
An' he roared from scrap to scrap.

But Traipsin' Dan he met up with doom
In a most peculiar way;
'Cause he ketched a cold—an' he got too bold—
An' he'd never l'arned to pray . . .
'Twas a London dive where he brewed a brawl,
An' he got shot dead in a free-for-all
By a dame which sang in a music hall;
An' her name was Maudie Faye . . .
Most calamitous, melo-dramatus
Doom, as th' poets say . . .
An' her name was Maudie Faye.



'Cause Maudie Faye was a-singin' there
Of a sad, heart rendin' song;
But Traipsin' Dan was a lowdown man,
An' he laughed both loud an' long—
An' he laughed out loud with a sort of squeak
('Cause he'd ketched a cold an' he couldn't speak)
An' th' dame went wild an' begun t' shriek,
An' she swore he done her wrong!
Most hair raisin'est, female brazenest
Voice, like a fire gong . . .
An' she swore he done her wrong!

She yells: "Ye blighter, now duck an' pr'y!"
With a voice right shrill an' grim;
But he blinked his eyes in a dumb surprise,
An' he shook in ev'ry limb . . .
For he couldn't speak an' he couldn't pray
('Cause he'd ketched a cold in the fog that day)
An' she pulled her gat an' she blazed away—
An' that was the end of him!
Most regrettable, unforgetable
Fate of a traipsin' whim!
But that was the end of him!



When a Cattle Rustler Turns Square

HORNET

By

OSCAR E. JENSEN

THE CLEAR tenor voice of Diamond Bar Slim echoed in the narrow coulee at the tapering end of the sweetgrass pocket:

> "There'll be a great roundup
> Where the cowboys will stand like dogies;
> A rider from Heaven with a whip that will cut them—
> Be sure that your name is down in His great tally book."

From the wedge tent, in front of which Diamond Bar Slim stood drinking in the crisp March air of the bad lands of New Mexico and throwing out his voice in the old cowboy refrain, came the gruff voice of old Powderhorn Red:

"What th' hell you singin' about out there, an' me hittin' th' bed ground less'n an hour ago?"

"Less'n an hour ago, d'ju say, Powderhorn?"

Slim seemed to be addressing the brilliant sunrise, rather than the man in the tent.

"Yeah." Old Powderhorn's voice was heavy with sleep. "I had to rope an' knee that there ol' renegade red steer that's b'n a tryin' to stampede that herd of our'n f'r th' las' three nights."

A somnolent grunt indicated that Pow-

derhorn Red had again settled into his blankets.

Diamond Bar Slim dropped the water bucket that had been swinging at his side. He whirled around, his face taking on the flaming color of the sunrise. He grabbed at the flap of the tent.

"Did you shore 'nuff knee that critter?"

Across Slim's mind flashed a visualization of the manner in which a puncher of Powderhorn's evident brutal nature would throw the renegade steer and how cruelly he would slash the skin over the knee and sever the cord. The thought of the renegade limping over the range, daily losing flesh, red eyed and thick tongued in his suffering for want of water because of his inability properly to cover the distances between the changing feeding grounds and the water hole, maddened Slim.

"I shore did," answered Powderhorn, "an' with no thanks to you. I'm damned sick o' crawlin' out to find out why some critter's a bellerin', an' findin', every time I rides out there, that th' renegade has b'n hornin' up some critter out from a warm bed."

"You know damned well, you ol' buzzard, that you've b'n itchin' to slash your ol' knife 'crost that poor critter's knee."

Slim's voice was freighted with feeling. He glared at old Powderhorn Red.

"Whatcha want me to do, dewlap 'im?" A peevish irritability marked Powderhorn's words.

As Slim looked in the growing light on the puffy, flame lidded eyes of Powderhorn, his own fingers itched to slit out a finger shaped wedge of skin above Powderhorn's eyes, allowing the strip of skin to fall over the dissipation reddened eyes in the operation suggested by Powderhorn's question. He seemed to see Powderhorn stumbling along, half blind, like a dewlapped beef critter. The tent flap fluttered in the tense grip of Slim's trembling hand. His voice was reasonably calm, however, as he said:

"You didn't hafta do nothin to that there renegade, Powderhorn. Them cattle ain't a goin' ta git out o' that there pocket, I don't guess; with us down here, even if th' ol' renegade has b'n hornin' up th' sleepers. They shore ain't a-goin'ta climb that there sand rock."

"No," Powderhorn muttered drowsily. "I reckon you ain't never seen no stampedes. They's nigh on twenty-three hundred head in that there gap, an' even if they can't git out 'cep'n through this here coulee, all hell couldn't stop 'em once they started out thisaway, let alone one reg'lar puncher an' a tenderfoot waddy."

"You're an' ol' dogie rus'lin' cayote," shouted Slim, slapping the tent flap as a parting shot."

"An' you," came the muffled voice of Powderhorn, as he snuggled into his blankets, "you're an' ol' hippercrit, singin' that there damned ol' salvation song o' your'n, an' two thousan' odd beef critters grazin' in th' pocket—critters that sh'd, by rights, be on their way to th' stockyards this summer with th' rest o' th' Rafter A cattle."

"By rights is right," muttered Slim, loudly enough for Powderhorn to hear, "an' by rights we sh'd be in th' pen; me f'r cuttin' 'em out o' th' Rafter A herd, an' you f'r shovin' 'em in here."

"They won't be Rafter A branded for very long," chuckled Powderhorn.

Diamond Bar Slim picked up the water bucket and started for the spring that lay like a shimmering mirror among the flags and slough grass at the base of a rounded knob of hill land some distance from the tent. His voice rang out in song again, with the closing line of the first stanza of what Powderhorn Red had called the salvation song—

> "Be sure that your name is down in His great tally book!"

Nailed to a piece of cottonwood limb stuck into the ground at the edge of the spring was a board on which was painted, with the inky black residue of grease from a pie wagon axle, this ominous warning—

PIZEN SPRING

Slim dipped up a bucket of sparkling water from the spring and turned back toward the tent. Again his voice rang

out clearly. He sang, commencing the second stanza of the salvation song, with all the feeling and beseeching earnestness of a revivalist—

"For He knows each one by his ear mark and brand—"

A whinnying from a distant clump of cottonwoods caught Slim's ear. He turned and shouted, in cheery greeting, to a magnificent black gelding that stood in the long early morning shade of the cottonwoods—

"Hornet, you ol' black devil. C'mere!"

The horse trotted over toward Slim. As he approached Slim could see many little telltale evidences of fatigue.

"By Gawd!" Slim muttered. "Hornet's b'n rode down, shore as hell."

Slim's conviction was clinched as he saw dried, whitish colored lather and saddle marks on the glistening black body. With only the merest pat of a hand on Hornet's quivering nose, Slim turned and ran to the tent.

"Powder," he yelled, as he neared the tent, "what th' hell you b'n ridin' my hoss for?"

"Me a-ridin' your hoss?"

Powderhorn raised up sleepily as Slim burst into the tent. Resting on his elbow, he dug his fist into his sleep heavy eyes and mumbled:

"Oh, shore! I reckon tha's the handiest hoss I c'd git a hol' of to rope that there red steer. You don't reckon I was a-goin'ta run that whol' cavvy down to catch a hoss, do you?"

Slim, his face livid with suppressed rage, and ignoring Powderhorn's remarks, alternated between jerky reachings for his belt gun, and, stooping over the recumbent figure, shaking his fist in Powderhorn's face. As if asking the question for the first time he shouted—

"Powder, you ornery snake, what the hell made you ride my hoss?"

A movement of Powderhorn's hand toward his pillow—a folding of Powderhorn's chaps—prompted Slim to make a vicious kick at Powderhorn's .45, which went spinning against the wall of the tent. Slim unbuckled his belt and threw the belt and his own gun over the rumpled blankets of his own bed.

"Git up here, you old snake, I'm a-goin'ta clean you."

As he roared the words Slim grabbed Powderhorn's shirt collar and jerked him to his feet. Releasing his grasp on the collar, Slim caught Powderhorn full on the point of the jaw, sending Powderhorn backward against the wall and sloping top of the tent, where Powderhorn went down in a crumpled heap, his elbow striking the butt of his gun. In a flash Powderhorn had the enraged Slim covered.

Slim, aware of his helplessness, stood trembling with rage.

Powderhorn laughed a hoarse, throaty laugh.

"I tol' you 'at you was a tenderfoot," chuckled Powderhorn.

His heavy body shook like jelly, but his gun was as steady and as motionless as if nailed to a post.

"You're a wise *hombre*, ain't you, Slim; knockin' a man over an' lettin' 'im pile up on his own gun. You're smart, ain't you? Now le' me give you a bit o' advice. You jes' lay quiet till we git rid o' this bunch o' stock an' git our money. We cain't either o' us handle this bunch alone an' it ain't no time n'r no place to be callin' in new hands. Now git the hell out o' this tent an' cook some chuck. I'll look after the gun."

SLIM, realizing the need for conciliatory measures until, at least, he could again lay hands on his gun, prepared, over a fire of cottonwood, the regular breakfast of bacon, gravy and coffee. From the dead gray coals of last night's fire he took the baking of biscuits that Powderhorn had mixed up the evening before.

"Git up, you ol' longhorn, an' rattle y'r hocks," Slim shouted as, breakfast ready, he threw a chunk of cottonwood against the dust covered tent. "Come an' git it or I'll throw it out to the magpies!"

On a line midway between the easterly

extremity of Chalk Mountain to the north and the termination of the serrated skyline of Blue Stone Mountain to the south, the sun was climbing well up in the heavens. The crisp, invigorating tingle of the early morning air was giving place to the heavy, humid warmth that portended a blistering hot day. Squatted on the chicograss that hugged the edge of the trampled area around the tent and covered the shallow soil at the entrance to the coulee, the two punchers sat at breakfast.

Diamond Bar Slim, young, merry eyed and handsome in a dark, brown eyed fashion, looked over the top of his tin coffee cup into the seamed and wrinkled flabbiness of old Powderhorn Red's face. The florid face of Powderhorn Red and the straggling remnants of hair over his ears—scattered hairs like red threads dangling from his bald scalp—explained a part of his nickname. A claim he made of honest employment at some time in the distant past with the Powderhorn outfit accounted for the rest of his name.

He was a squattily built man and had something of the appearance of a monstrous toad as he sat, tailor fashion, at breakfast. He had spread a generous portion of gravy over a couple of biscuits on the tin plate cupped between his legs and pressed against the buckle of his belt. As he lowered his knife from his mouth and swallowed the soggy mouthful of biscuit he said:

"These here death wads ain't half bad with that rip snortin' heifer's delight you made, Slim."

Slim, sensing Powderhorn's overture toward a more friendly feeling, replied:

"It ain't the heifer's delight, Powderhorn; it's them there death wads you kicked up las' night. They're good."

"An' this is swell javvy, Slim."

Powderhorn gulped his coffee.

"I reckon I couldn't 've made it no better, Powderhorn, if I'd bin makin' it f'r th' cool captain of th' 101 outfit."

"Well, Slim," Powderhorn talked hesitantly, "there ain't no sense in your gittin' irritated 'count o' my ridin' that cayuse o' your'n. He was th' handies' hoss I c'd ketch an' they was close on twenty-three hundred head at stake. Now, Slim, they ain't no use'n us a-quarrelin' over that hoss o' your'n, 'cause you wouldn't 've had no hoss if ' hadn't got 'im out o' hock f'r you."

Slim sat studying the face of his partner, striving to find some hidden meaning of this unusually friendly attitude on the part of Powderhorn, who had, ever since Slim had joined with him in the rustling of some twenty-three hundred head of Rafter A cattle, been domineering and swaggeringly overbearing. Slim had met Powderhorn Red in a Pecos City gambling house, where Slim had, in the frenzy of a three day stud poker game, lost his pet saddle horse.

Slim, a puncher, acting as line rider for the Rafter A outfit, had been approached by Powderhorn Red, who had offered to redeem Slim's saddle horse if Slim would join him in a little venture, as Powderhorn had expressed it. Desperately anxious to recover his pet, Slim had given Powderhorn his hand, exclaiming as he did so—

"You git me Hornet back an' I'll go to hell with you, stranger."

AND HELL, indeed, it had been for Diamond Bar Slim. Riding line for the Rafter A, Slim had been compelled to shove varying sized bunches of cattle into the secluded pocket where they were now camped. Powderhorn's greed had seemed insatiable, and it was not until a total of nearly twenty-three hundred head had been cached in the pocket that Powderhorn was willing to acknowledge Slim's obligation squared.

Slim had deserted the Rafter A outfit. He was now joined with Powderhorn, had agreed to assist Powderhorn in the working over of the Rafter A brand to a brand devised by Powderhorn, the Rafter A W Bar, and was to share with Powderhorn in the proceeds of the sale of the herd to a Montana banker with whom Powderhorn had been negotiating. The banker was to meet Powderhorn in the bad lands pocket at a later date.

The low estate to which he had fallen caused Slim to experience strange revulsions of feeling as he looked into Powderhorn's face. In spite of the terrific price which he had been compelled to pay, he felt appreciative of Powderhorn's assistance in getting back his horse. Because of the terrific price, loss of honor and self-respect, and because of his knowledge that he must, after the sale of the herd was consummated, seek a distant range where he must ride under a constant fear of apprehension by the law, Slim felt a growing urge to kill Powderhorn at the first opportunity. He found himself unable to speak to the man who waited for some acknowledgment, from him, of the justice of what he had said. Powderhorn spoke again—

"Well, son, do you s'pose you c'n behave y'rself if I give you back your gun?"

"Give 'er here, pard." Slim swallowed his aversion to Powderhorn as he extended his hand. "But they's two things I'm a wantin' to do, Powderhorn. I want to take that there pizen spring sign back to the Blue Stone trail an' put it where it b'longs, in th' Dead Man's arsenic spring. I want to do that *pronto*. An' I want to kill that there renegade steer. I'll take my gun if I c'n do them there things 'at needs doin'."

"You c'n kill th' renegade," answered Powderhorn. "I've had my fun with the critter, but, son, you don't seem to realize that th' arsenic spring's our main protection. We can't put that there sign back. We mought's well throw our guns away. An' I want the sign here, 'cause if some *hombre* comes scoutin' over the hump, havin' passed up th' Blue Stone spring, he's a goin'ta be damn dry when he hits this gap. An' he ain't a-goin' to git no water here, not if I sees him fust; an' if I don't see him, he's a goin'ta be damn shy o' the water in our spring."

Slim sat with lowered eyes, studying over the situation which he faced. Rustler, outlaw—murderer, possibly, even now, as he realized the possibility, and probability—of some thirsty rider dismounting to kneel at the Dead Man's arsenic spring. Where was the joy that he had felt in his heart as he had stepped from the tent earlier in the morning with a song on his lips?

"I don't want my gun."

Slim looked squarely into the eyes of Powderhorn, his own eyes blazing with the flame of the hatred that had been smouldering in his heart.

"I'm a-goin'ta ride over to the Blue Stone trail with that there sign, Powderhorn, an' if you stop me, it'll mean that you'll haf'ta handle these here cattle alone."

To Slim's surprise Powderhorn reached behind him, picked up Slim's belt and gun and tossed them over to him.

"Here's you gun, son." Powderhorn's voice was calm, his manner friendly. "I'm ridin' in this mornin' f'r grub, an' I'll drop by an' leave that there sign. You c'n go out an' kill the renegade—an' good luck to you!"

POWDERHORN had been gone a full hour when, the renegade red steer disposed of and a quarter of beef thrown off at the camp, Slim turned Hornet's head toward the easterly wall of the pocket where, as Slim had figured out, there might be found a short, although highly dangerous and difficult trail over the mountains. It was Slim's hope to reach a point from which he might observe whether or not Powderhorn Red would keep his promise to post the sign at Dead Man's arsenic spring.

The trip, as planned by Slim, would call upon every ounce of the great strength of Hornet. As carefully as a burro, Hornet picked his way over the slide rock and reached, some time after noon, the sand rock ledges of the higher divide.

From a projecting rim of rock Slim could command an outlook over a considerable portion of the Blue Stone trail. He could see, far below him, a lone horseman. From his vantage point Slim could observe the slow progress of the horseman along the tortuous trail. It would be fully an hour before the horseman could reach Dead Man's arsenic spring.

Slim rolled a smoke; rolled another; and another. The horseman reached the spring, stopped as if to examine an object which Slim had observed lying near the spring, but which, because of the distance, Slim had been unable to identify. Then the horseman had gone on without dismounting. The horseman had traveled some distance beyond the spring, when, so Slim observed, he had thrown something from him.

Slim had caught a glint of sunlight which flashed from an object that had disappeared in the darkened streak that marked a trail side cañon. Slim climbed into the saddle and followed the ledge of sand rock to a point where it narrowed down to a path hardly wider than the length of a man's foot. After assuring himself that there was no chance for Hornet to go farther, he dismounted.

Slim studied the mountain side. Below him, fully twenty feet or more, was another ledge, wider than the widest point of the one he had been following. It seemed to offer a reasonably good route down to the slide rock. Tying his rope to the horn of his saddle, Slim let himself down to the ledge. The drop was not quite sheer, but because of the narrowness of the ledge, Slim questioned the possibility of getting Hornet down.

Slim followed the ledge to a point where it rounded a turn in the mountain wall. He was returning to the point to which he had at first descended when his attention was attracted to a ledge some ten or twelve feet below him. This ledge was wider than the one on which he was standing, widened appreciably at the turn in the mountain wall and seemed to be an extension of a table of sand rock which he thought he had passed on his way to the lookout point from which he had studied Powderhorn's movements.

Slim caught a handhold on the rim of the ledge and let himself down to the lower ledge. He walked first around the turn of the mountain wall and found that the ledge narrowed down to a mere thread. He returned along the ledge and worked his way up toward the table of sand rock. He had gone only a short way up the rather steep slope of the ledge toward the table when he realized that he was separated from the table of sand rock by a deep cañon, whose higher side was the table of sand rock and on whose lower side rim, he stood looking down into its depths.

It was not until he had returned to the point he had first reached that he realized his actual predicament. It was impossible for him to scale the wall that separated him from the ledge to which he had first dropped. There was no opportunity to get down, or to get off the ledge, except by a suicidal jump.

Slim sat on a hammock of sand rock, rolled a smoke and carefully thought over the situation. Only a short distance, a tantalizingly short distance above him, but far enough above him to make it humanly impossible to jump up and catch the handhold from which he had so thoughtlessly dropped, was the ledge on which lay the end of his rope.

Slim removed his shirt and chaps, knotted them together and, tying a spur to a leg of his chaps with his muffler, attempted by throwing the spur over the rim of the ledge above him to catch the hondo of the rope. After repeated trials Slim succeeded in catching the rawhide loop at the end of the rope. With his first cautious pull on his improvised fishing line the spur, caught by the shank, slipped loose.

As the chaps came dropping down over his shoulders, Slim caught a leg of the leather batwing chaps and threw the tangle of wearing apparel on the sand rock floor of the ledge.

"Damn sich an idjit as I am, droppin' down here, an' twice f'r a fool f'r not lookin' to see how I was a-goin' ta git back."

Slim's vehement outburst of self censure was echoed back to him by the opposite cañon wall.

He looked up to the higher ledge on which Hornet was standing. The black gelding seemed in studious meditation. Possibly due to Slim's shouted condem-

nation of himself, Hornet watched him for a time; then, without command or order from his master, the horse walked along the narrowing ribbon of ledge, placed his forefeet against the sand stone wall below the rim of the ledge. Before Slim could shout a warning, "Whoa!" an avalanche of horse, sand rock fragments and dust landed on the ledge just above Slim's head.

Slim ducked, breathed a silent prayer that the horse would stay put on the ledge and looked up when convinced that the last of the flying débris had passed over him. Hanging over the edge of the ledge, within easy hand reach, was the end of Slim's rope. Hornet stood looking down, apparently quite proud of his achievement.

It was a matter of seconds for Slim to pull the rope taut and climb to the ledge.

"Hornet, ol' hoss," Slim chuckled as he patted the sleek, black coat while making a hurried examination of the hocks and rump of his pet, "you shore got more sense than I have. That was my only chance, an' you seen it afore I did."

DOWN along narrow ledges and over the slide rock Hornet jumped, slid and, after experiences which would have been disastrous to any other than a horse of Hornet's surefootedness, landed on the Blue Stone trail a short half mile from Dead Man's arsenic spring.

Not far from the point at which they reached the trail, Slim found, lodged in a clump of chaparral in a coulee alongside of the trail, the sign that Powderhorn had promised to place at the arsenic spring.

All of the bitter hatred for Powderhorn Red, nursed during Slim's association with the man; all of the mad urge to kill, that had surged over Slim during their early morning quarrel over Powderhorn's riding of Hornet, burst out into a devastating fire which consumed every final spark of self-control in Slim's soul.

Touching Hornet lightly with his rowels and bitterly regretting the additional loss of time in having to ride to the arsenic spring to post the sign, Slim rode madly to the spring. He posted the warning sign in the black mud at the edge of the pool of death and, with only a hurried glance at a dead beef steer which had caught his eye from his mountain lookout station, leaped into the saddle. He was on his way after Powderhorn Red.

A madness swept over Slim. It seemed to be conveyed to the great black horse, too. Hornet's flying hoofs struck sparks from the rock of the trail. Something of a feeling of relief came over Slim, even though his anger increased, as he realized that he was through, forever, with the isolated bad lands pocket and the man who had been responsible for the rustling of the herd of cattle which grazed on the sweetgrass of the pocket.

He burst into song, and strangely, his fine tenor voice was hurling the last stanza of the salvation song against the wall of sand rock that, for a long distance, skirted one side or the other of the trail:

> "For He knows each one by his earmark and brand;
> And the path to perdition is blazed and staked
> All the way down—
> While the path to heaven is narrow and dim."

The first creeping shadows of late afternoon were dimming the lights of the deeper cañons when Slim saw far ahead of him in an open stretch of the trail the slumped figure of Powderhorn and the plodding mount on which he was riding. Slim's first impulse was to let out a yell, but he choked it back. Hornet increased his speed. This caused Slim to wonder.

"Gittin' lonesome f'r a hoss critter, Hornet?" Slim asked, puzzled over Hornet's burst of speed. "Or have you got somethin' agin that there cayote that's a-ridin' ahead, same as I have?"

Slim's second question was prompted by his conviction, forced upon him by Hornet's terrific, unspurred efforts to maintain and even increase his unbelievable speed, that Hornet, urged on by a

memory of gross mistreatment by Powderhorn on the preceding night, was straining every muscle of his powerful body because of Hornet's own determination to overtake the rider ahead.

They rounded a sharp bend of the trail. Hornet drew up sharply. Just ahead of them was Powderhorn's sorrel. Powderhorn, apparently having heard the pounding hoofbeats, had half turned and was looking, with startled eyes, over his left shoulder. His left hand gripped the cantle of his saddle. Lifting his gun, Powderhorn blazed away. Slim, yelling like a fiend in taunting derision over Powderhorn's miss, whanged one over as he shouted:

"That's one each—"

Slim's words were chopped off abruptly; for, as Powderhorn's body lunged sidewise from the sorrel, the dying man's finger, in a convulsive death spasm, pressed the trigger. Slim felt a sharp, smashing, burning sensation along his scalp. A feeling of giddiness was abruptly followed by one of acute nausea.

"This 'll never do, Hornet," Slim mumbled thickly.

With numbing fingers Slim unbuckled his rope and, swaying dizzily, commenced looping the rope over the horn of his saddle. Painfully carrying the rope around his body with hands that functioned as clumsily as hunks of lead, Slim managed to make a wrap around the horn before lunging heavily forward on Hornet's neck.

Like a gliding arrow the sunlight was creeping along the floor of the Rafter. A ranch-house. Breakfast was under way. A faint whinnying was heard above the clatter of pans and dishes. A puncher strode to the window.

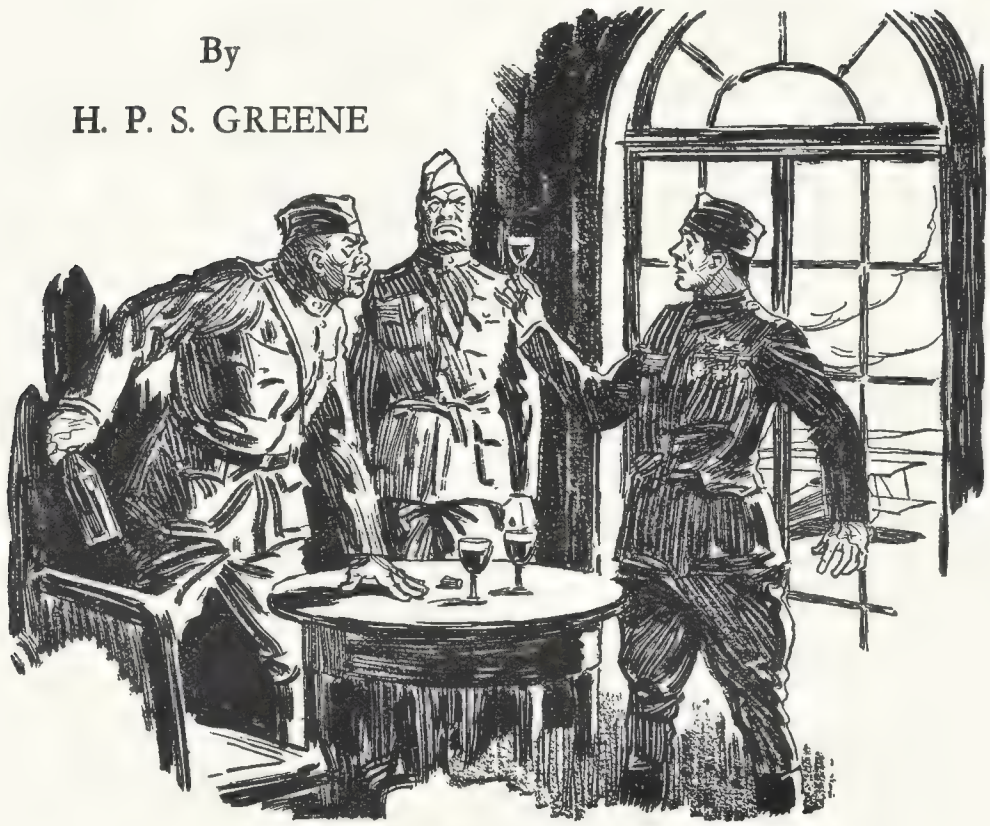
"By Gawd!" he exclaimed, as he looked out on a black gelding that swayed with exhaustion under a form that hung like a half emptied sack of meal. "Hornet an' Slim!"

PECULIAR OFFICERS

A Story of the War Flyers

By

H. P. S. GREENE



THE NEWLY arrived major clapped the boy who had been appointed his orderly on the shoulder in a friendly and familiar manner.

"Son," he said, "go on up to headquarters and tell that pot bellied old walrus—what's his name? Major Sproutz—that I want to use his Cadillac for an hour or two."

The orderly walked away, shaking his head to dispel the fog in his brain. It was a peculiar remark for a major to make, but then this was a most peculiar major.

He was an ordinary looking, stocky man, with large hands and long arms; his only remarkable features were his hard blue eyes, which were surrounded by smile wrinkles to relieve their intensity.

But he had so many palms on his *Croix de Guerre* that if he gathered many more he would have to wear two medals and their ribbons to support them, after the manner of Fonck. He also wore the *Legion d'Honneur*, the British Military Cross and the Belgian *Croix de Guerre* and, most important of all, the *Medaille Militaire*. If the *Medaille Militaire* appears

upon the breast of a man who is still alive and in full possession of all the organs with which he was born, ninety-nine times out of a hundred that man has done something for which he should be decorated. The *Medaille Militaire* carries a small pension, which dead men do not need, and mutilated men receive anyway. The French are an economical nation.

While the orderly was approaching headquarters in a hesitant and timorous fashion, the commanding officer of the field at Grenouillere, Major Sproutz, was in conference with his adjutant, Lieutenant Jot.

"Why did they send the fellow here in the first place?" Major Sproutz was saying anxiously. "There's something funny about that to start with. Why send a pursuit pilot, a big ace, to a bombing squadron at all? And then, I didn't like his manner. What did he mean by laughing in my face like that?"

Lieutenant Jot tactfully refrained from remarking that almost any one might laugh after taking a good look at Major Sproutz' face. That is not the sort of thing which adjutants are supposed to say.

"That's just what one would expect such fools as this stupid American Army to do," he replied. "Why did they send eleven hundred Chinamen to St. Maixent? Why did—"

A knock on the door interrupted him.

"Gurf!" growled Major Sproutz, in a voice calculated to frighten intruders.

Sustained by the rank for which he was acting as messenger, the orderly of the bemedaled major entered and saluted. He had enough sense and knowledge to revise his officer's request.

"Sir," he said, "Major Renault's compliments, and he would like to use your Cadillac for two hours."

Major Sproutz purpled. He was about to erupt harsh words when he received a kick under the table from his subordinate.

"Gurf!" he grunted in angry pain. That was a peculiar thing for an adjutant to do.

"Here's an order for the major's chauffeur," said Jot suavely, scribbling on a pad of paper, tearing off the top sheet and handing it to the orderly.

"Damn his soul," said Sproutz, after the orderly had saluted and gone out. "How does he have the nerve? He must know that Cadillac is for the official use of the commanding officer of this field. What does he mean by asking to use it? Does he nothing of Army regulations know?"

"Careful of your verbs, Major," warned Jot. "When you are angry you have a tendency to leave them out of their proper place in an English sentence, and give them an unimportant position at the end. It might create a bad impression, especially among the French, who are not such fools as the Americans. As to Renault, remember that he has never seen commissioned service. He served one enlistment as a private in China. What fools these English and Americans are to give a man high rank just because he is an ace. Still, by allowing him to take the car, you can find out from the chauffeur where he has gone. Also, you must remember that at present his rank is the same as your own."

"You forget that yours is not," said Sproutz sourly.

"Not in the United States Army, to be sure," returned Jot, with a sharp glance. The commanding officer and the adjutant of the flying field at Grenouillere glared at each other for a moment.

"But all the same, I don't like the idea of this Renault being here, and we must find a way to get rid of him without suspicion," the major said. "Things have been going too smoothly to have them spoiled now."

"It might be better," Jot agreed, "provided we run no risk. I have an idea." He lowered his voice and spoke earnestly into the major's ear.

At that moment Major Renault was climbing into the Cadillac limousine.

"Hop in, son," he said to the orderly, patting the seat beside him hospitably. The astounded orderly obeyed.

"Grenouillere is good," the major went on. "A swamp, a place of frogs. If there

aren't frogs, there ought to be. What a fog! And what a dampness! I feel the chill of it in my bones. Tell the driver to go to a place where there is rum."

"I'll tell him to go to the Café de Commerce," said the orderly. "But for rum, I doubt if you can get any."

"We'll see," replied the major grimly.

WHILE the Cadillac was splashing toward town and the Café de Commerce, General Bodell, Chief of Air Service of the Army, sat in his headquarters at Sully, forty miles away. He finished reading something aloud, and turned to his aide, Lieutenant-colonel Dummer, who was alone with him in the office.

"Do you think of anything to add to that?" he inquired.

The lieutenant-colonel tried to look wise, failed, and shook his head vaguely.

"Very well, then. Have it typed, or better, take no chances and type it yourself, and send it to Major Renault immediately."

"Very good, sir," said the colonel, saluting briskly before he turned and left the room.

"What a solemn ass the man is," thought the general. "Still, he has no authority to amount to anything here, and can't do any particular harm. As far as I know he keeps his mouth shut—he's too stupid and lazy to open it."

When Major Renault entered the Café de Commerce followed by his orderly, the madame greeted him and his medals with enthusiasm, and led him to a table with a curtesy.

"You are a great ace!" she exclaimed. "Ah, the great American ace, Renault. You honor my poor house. What may I bring *monsieur le commandant*?"

"You have rum, madame?" inquired Renault.

"But yes, *mon commandant*. We still have some in our cellar carefully concealed from the riff-raff. But for so great an ace as commandant Renault!"

"Two hot rums. I have cold and thirst," said the major.

"But certainly, *mon commandant!*" exclaimed madame, scurrying away to return presently with two steaming glasses.

The orderly took the drink and chair his major offered him, and leaned back and basked in the glory shed by this great man, who spoke French like a native, and to whom hard boiled café owners bowed down. To think that he was actually sitting at the same table with this god of the air, and a major, too. The orderly again pinched himself to make sure that he was awake. He was, but the sad part of it was the boys in the squadron would never believe his tale. A private drinking with an ace and a major rolled into one! It was unbelievable.

Across the table, the major sipped his rum and thought deeply. The same question which was bothering Major Sproutz and Lieutenant Jot was equally annoying and inexplicable to him. Why, indeed, had he, a pursuit ace, been sent to a bombardment squadron?

There were two pursuit squadrons operating in the sector, and more should arrive any time. A pursuit ace would naturally be sent to one of them, to command it, or at least to act in an advisory capacity. Sending him to the bombers was like giving a highly paid racing driver a job on a truck.

Of course the whole thing might be a mistake. In that case it would soon be discovered and remedied. Or there might be some special purpose behind it. If so, they would notify him before long. At any rate, the major hoped the action would start soon. He had spent his life hunting action, and he craved it.

He was an adventurer par excellence. Born in the United States of French parents, he had run away from home at sixteen and spent fifteen years wandering over the earth in search of excitement. Only one black mark marred his record of adventurous freedom. Once in Peking he had thought himself in danger of starving to death, and enlisted in the American Army. It was characteristic of him to carry the thing through, but he still thought with disgust and rage of

those drab years of fatigue and standing guard and saluting before he could get discharged. One reason he had accepted his commission as major in the United States Army was in order that he might have the pleasure of annoying such officers as Major Sproutz.

The American public had demanded this commission for him. Among other thrilling occupations Renault had taken a crack at flying, and when the war broke out, he joined the French army. He had become a famous ace by the time America entered the war, and when it became widely known that he was an American citizen, a strong demand sprang up that he transfer, and he consented. But the way things were going he was beginning to be sorry he had done so. If they were going to stick him in some lumbering bombardment gang, "Good night!"

Still, there might be some special reason for it. Renault knew well that many a time the enlisted men know more than the officers about what is going on in an organization, and he determined to sound the orderly.

"Say, son," he remarked carelessly. "What kind of an outfit is this, anyway? The squadron, I mean. You don't need to be afraid of me," he went on, noting a look of apprehension in the boy's eyes. "I've been enlisted myself."

"I don't know, Major. All right, I guess," the orderly replied.

"Anything funny about it?" the ace persisted.

"I don't know," the boy repeated. "There was a funny sergeant came along two weeks ago and joined the outfit. Acts mysterious. Some think he's a spy. Sergeant Sprawn, his name is."

"How's the C. O?" Renault asked.

Again the darting look of suspicion in the orderly's eyes.

"I don't know," he said again. "He sees we get fed all right."

Renault saw that he would get nothing from this source.

"Go get the driver, and I'll tell madame to give you both a drink," he said.

THE ACE cursed the system which made it so hard for an officer to gain the confidence of an enlisted man, at least without a long acquaintance. He must try elsewhere. A lieutenant who wore an observer's wing was coming into the café. Possibly a chance there. Renault rose and called to the observer—

"Come on, Lieutenant, sit down and have a drink." The lieutenant came.

"You're Renault, of course," he said, shaking the hand the ace offered him. "I heard you were here, Major. My name's Bronk. What are you doing with a bombardment squadron?"

"That's what I'd like to know," replied Renault.

He took an instant fancy to the slim lieutenant, who had an air of debonair recklessness, and wore the ribbon of the *Croix de Guerre.*

"You've served with the French?"

"I was up with a bombardment *escadrille* for a month," the observer said.

The two talked of air activities farther north in which they had both been engaged. Then Renault repeated his question—

"What kind of an outfit is this?"

"Damned if I know," answered Bronk. "The C. O's, a regular Prussian for discipline, full of salutes and regulations. It's tough after a French squadron, but not so bad as the schools."

"C. O's, a Prussian, you say?" Renault asked.

"German descent, I guess, and acts like one; that's all I know," Bronk replied.

"Well, guess I'd better be taking back his car. If you want a ride, hop in," the ace said.

"How's the work been going?" he continued, when the Cadillac started back to the field.

"So-so," Bronk replied. "We make a raid most every good day. Sproutz and Jot lead 'em, too—something you won't find many other majors or adjutants doing in this man's Army."

"Any action?"

"Not much. We've had bum luck on

the bombing. The only time we ever hit anything was once we missed the target by a mile and landed 'em in a forest. There was a report came out that there were a lot of horses quartered there. That's Jot's fault, of course—he does the sighting. The Archies are terrible—never come anywhere near us with their shells. The Boche *chasse* come up after us every once in a while, but they seem to be scared to close in. But they picked off two stragglers last month. I noticed Jot's bullets when he was shooting at them missing by fifty yards. He sure is a bum shot."

"Humph," said Renault, and was silent.

That night on his cot he was still trying to find some head or tail to the puzzle, which was principally about why he had been sent to this bombardment squadron. He reviewed what he had been able to pick up. C. O. German, or German descent. That meant nothing; many of the best soldiers, even in the French army, were the same. Bum Archie, poor bomb dropping, Jot a bum shot, Boches only attack stragglers . . . A suspicion began to form in his brain, but he put it away as fantastic. He was asleep.

NEXT morning he woke to a rare, fine summer day. Such days are unusual indeed in the valley of the Meuse, as everybody knows; and especially in that part of the valley where lies the field at Grenouillere. Fogs and low clouds seem to hang there when all the rest of the country round about is clear. This day was to prove more replete with action than any other day of the ace's adventurous life.

He had his coffee, and wandered along in front of the hangars, looking at the bombers already drawn up along the line. They were ripe old crates—school ships which had been battered and abused by many an unskillful flyer, but they were all that the American Army had been able to pry away from the French so far.

Their motors, 350 horsepower Renaults, were all hand tooled, taking a long time to make, and were proportionately scarce. The French parted with each one as if it had been a drop of French blood, for even as the .75 was the culmination of French genius in artillery manufacture, the Renault was the most perfect airplane motor yet devised—according to the French, at least. England pressed the claims of the Rolls-Royce, Italy of Fiat, and Germany of Mercedes.

There was just one new ship upon the line, a fine new *corps d'armée* Breguet, designed for long distance reconnaisance, capable of ten to fifteen miles an hour better than the bombers, and carrying six hours of fuel. Probably it was the private property of Major Sproutz. But Renault resolved that if he had to fly a two-place machine at all, he would take the best available, even if he had to go to the mat with the C. O. or General Bodell himself.

The ace passed the ships and, as he strolled up to the laughing crowd gathered around the door of the operations office in the warm sun, he saw that Sproutz was coming along from the other direction, closely followed by Lieutenant Jot. The other flyers saluted Renault respectfully and shied away from him with an air of embarrassment. Bronk alone, who had had a taste of the democracy of the French air service greeted him familiarly.

"If he isn't careful the fat old slob will fall over backward," the observer remarked, indicating Major Sproutz with a shrug.

The commanding officer of the field at Grenouillere was indeed a ridiculous spectacle as he came strutting with his head back, kicking his legs stiffly out in front of him beneath his swelling paunch, with a suggestion of the goose step. He was a perfect illustration of red faced, pot bellied pomposity.

Frequently, during the period when he was a lowly private, Renault had been seized by an almost irresistible impulse to destroy the dignity of just such an officer by some prank worthy of a mischievous schoolboy. The impulse seized him again, and this time he obeyed it.

Stepping forward as Sproutz was bringing his hand down from a stiff salute in acknowledgment of those which greeted him, the ace seized it and shook it violently.

"A fine morning!" he bellowed. "Haw-haw!" And with this he pounded Sproutz heavily on the back with an assumption of boisterous goodfellowship. At the expression which came over the commanding officer's face, the flying officers and several enlisted men who were standing by joined in with unseemly guffaws. Wrenching his hand away, Sproutz hurried off in a manner suggestive of both a whipped dog and a punctured balloon, if such a combination is possible. Behind him stalked the scowling Jot. Once in the shelter of his private office Sproutz roared with fury.

"You saw! The *dumbkopf* is sent here to ruin me. He laughs at me. He in public me a fool of makes. *Gott in Himmel!*"

"Shut up!" snarled Jot in a voice weighted with such cold malignancy that the major was deflated once more. "Do you want to be shot against a wall?" The adjutant went on in low, furious tones. "Do you want to give yourself away at this time, when everything is going so well? Are you going to allow the antics of a stupid moon calf who knows nothing but how to fly and shoot to make you betray yourself—and me?"

"He must know!" exclaimed Sproutz. "Else why does he laugh at me?"

"Fool!" returned Jot. "On the other hand, his crazy actions prove that he knows nothing."

"Perhaps," said the major. "But he has gone too far. I will destroy him."

"How?" asked Jot. "You have no charges that would hold in even an Army court. His rank is equal to yours. If you charged him with lack of courtesy the court might say that he was not commissioned as an exponent of courtesy, but as a killer of Germans. You are foolish. What can you do?"

"I will send him on a solitary mission with you as observer," Sproutz said. "He will come back with a bullet in his head, you piloting the plane."

Jot looked at his superior with an air of contemptuous amusement.

"You would have an idea like that," he remarked. "I suppose a German flyer would come along and shoot him with a .45 caliber pistol. Bah! A fine story for me to tell!"

"Turn your machine gun on him," insisted Sproutz.

"There are still difficulties," replied Jot, thoughtfully. "The bullets are different from German ones. A burst fired at such close range would betray itself. There might be powder burns on his helmet. No, though he is a valuable man, and his death would be very acceptable, the risk would be too great at present. We must plan."

"And if I ordered you?" demanded Sproutz angrily.

"I should disobey," retorted his adjutant. "Remember that however we stand here, my rank in the Imperial army is higher than yours."

Major Sproutz choked angrily, but swallowed his wrath with an evil look.

"One thing I will do if you do not object," he said with heavy sarcasm. "Here is an order signed by Colonel Dummer for us to send a plane for contact work with the infantry at La Belloise. It is a foolish order from a foolish man. It will be dangerous work, and I will send Renault, 'because he is the best man we have'. That suits you?"

"Very well," agreed the adjutant.

MAJOR RENAULT was not at all pleased when he received his orders to do contact work in an observation plane. Flying low over infantry rifles and machine guns was extremely dangerous work, even in a fast darting Spad. Furthermore, it was thankless work.

It must be admitted that great aces under the adulation of the populace generally gained a proper idea of their own importance and value. They watched the growth of their scores with a proud

and jealous eye, and were usually permitted to go about adding to them in whatever manner they thought fit. Renault was the least conceited of them all, perhaps, yet this was certainly a serious affront to his dignity, and he felt it deeply. After all, a man does not work and risk his life daily for years and attain high rank in his profession for nothing.

However, he had no thought of questioning the order. In some ways discipline might have been lax in the French air service, but not when it was a question of obeying operations orders. A sergeant might shake his fist under the whiskered chin of a captain over a drink in the cantine and call him a fat fool, but if the captain officially ordered him to attack Potsdam, the non-com would attempt to do so. Renault told an M. S. E. to have the *corps d'armée* machine warmed. He had resolved to have the best ship available for his work, and thought that by taking it without permission he would avoid argument. Then he called Bronk.

"Want a ride?" he inquired.

"Sure thing," exclaimed the pleased observer, flattered by this invitation from the ace. "Just a minute and I'll have my flying clothes."

"It'll be a rough one," Renault warned. "It's contact work, and should be flown by *chasse* machines, and I'm going to fly it as much like *chasse* as I can."

"Suits me, Major," returned Bronk, grinning.

But though he had not questioned the order verbally, Renault had food for thought as he took off.

"What an Army," he thought, "where they send their highest ranking pursuit ace to do contact work with infantry in an observation machine!"

Much more of this sort of thing and he would see General Bodell. In spite of his lack of conceit, the affair appeared to him as a stupid move by headquarters. Sent out with proper assistance he might easily bag three German ships in a day, as he had done before. Or, in command of a squadron of green pursuit pilots, he would be able to show the boys a few little tricks which some of them would not be able to learn otherwise until that terrible moment of enlightenment which came one instant after a mistake and another before a violent death.

He took the Breguet up to a thousand meters and put her through a few *chandelles* to get the feel of her. Although she was an excellent observation plane, one of the very best which had been produced up to that time, the Breguet seemed horribly slow and logy to Renault, who had flown nothing heavier than Spads and Nieuports for two years. Furthermore, the Breguet was designed to gain its maximum efficiency at about five thousand meters. At that altitude, with her superior wing surfaces and power, she could give a good account of herself to any German pursuit ship yet developed. But near the ground, not so good.

Toward the lines, Renault came down and did a little hedge hopping, or, more properly speaking, contour flying. He did this both for practise and to keep the Germans in ignorance of his coming as long as possible. He had flown over this country for months the year before, and it was one of his front yards.

What had once been the village of La Belloise was now only a name and some crumbled stone. The village had been flattened in the first place during a French offensive almost four years before, and pounded periodically since. Renault flew over it, watching the ground carefully. He knew he was at the most advanced American line.

The scene below him was like a moving picture running wild. A crowd of doughboys in a hole, several pointing at him excitedly. One raising his rifle to shoot, another seizing it and pulling it down. Barbed wire and holes. A dozen or so dead men. Renault had been ordered to find panels and allow his observer to report on them. There were no panels to be seen.

A gray, pot helmeted form ducking into a dugout. A black anti-aircraft burst before him. That Boche balloon ahead must be busy. A ripping row of holes

three feet away in his left wing. In a burst of anger Renault threw the Breguet up and around in a *chandelle*, gunning her smoothly through the top of the turn. Then into a dive. Instinctively he knew where the machine gun must be—under that tangled heap of stones and iron. Fixing it behind the ball and inside the innermost ring of his sights, the ace cut loose with his one Vickers gun, cursing because it was not two, as in the Spad he had left behind in the French squadron.

Barely ten feet from the ground he pulled up, and heard Bronk's twin Lewises give forth a continuous rolling roar. Good boy, Bronk! He had kept his head and his feet, and spotted the gun, or at least the place at which his pilot had been shooting. Once more Renault flew over the American lines. No panels, no signals, nothing. Plainly the infantry had never heard of him or his mission, or else cared nothing about it. What staff work! What stupidity!

In disgust Renault turned his nose back toward the field at Grenouillere. Gaining a safe altitude, he handed Bronk the stick. Let him play with the old freight car. That was all it was good for.

AS RENAULT and Bronk were landing, Major Sproutz was pointing a trembling finger at a piece of paper on his desk. His eyes were staring and swollen veins stood out on his face and neck. Looking over his shoulder, the little greenish eyes of Lieutenant Jot were cold and expressionless.

"They know!" gasped Major Sproutz. "Bodell knows! But why has he sent the letter through me? Are they making game of us?"

"No," corrected Jot. "They don't know. They only suspect. They tell Renault to watch, and get in touch with Sergeant Sprawn. That Sprawn! I wondered why he was sent here?"

"Now do you admit that Renault must die at once?" asked Sproutz.

"Yes," said Jot. "I will see to it. He must die, and this afternoon we will raid according to our plan."

"I will kill Sprawn," said Sproutz, taking a .45 caliber pistol from his desk.

"Don't be a fool!" snapped Jot. "He is unimportant. And he may have to make a report at a certain time. We don't want Bodell coming around here to find out why he doesn't. But for Renault —yes, he must die. His death will be a blow to the Allies—to the morale of French and Americans alike. Let me see. You order him to attack a balloon. There is the one near Chambrey. Three Spads have been lost attacking it. But I will go, too, to make things doubly sure. He will return dead, and there will be no chance to examine into the affair. The whole squadron will take off at once, to avenge him. Ha! That will be good!"

"You are clever, Jot," said Sproutz admiringly.

"Colonel Jot, tomorrow, you fat swine," returned this peculiar adjutant. The major smiled ingratiatingly.

As Major Renault was leaving the operations room for his quarters he cursed under his breath when he was was handed an order by Lieutenant Jot, who acted as operations officer as well as adjutant. He cursed again, loudly this time, when he read the order and saw that it said to attack the balloon near Chambrey.

"Are they all fools?" he asked, shaking a large bony fist under the small nose of Jot. "To send an observation bombing plane to attack balloons?"

"Three fast Spads have already been lost attacking it, it is so well protected," sneered Jot. "The major doesn't refuse the order? Is he afraid? I will go with him to encourage him."

"Bah!" said the ace with cold fury. "But I will have my lunch first. There is nothing in the order about time, and one doesn't attack balloons on an empty stomach."

In the offing, the keen eye of Lieutenant Jot spotted Sergeant Sprawn, lounging around in what he intended to be an inconspicuous manner. The adjutant

thought fast. He must prevent a consultation between these two.

"Major Sproutz's compliments, and he requests that you have lunch with him," he said to Renault.

Renault hesitated. He was without any enthusiasm for the company of Sproutz, but knew that such an invitation was practically a command. At least, to refuse it would be to give grave offense.

"Thanks," he said, and walked away with Jot. Sergeant Sprawn watched them anxiously.

In the building where the commanding officer and the adjutant lived together in private state, Renault looked around for the *aperitif* which would have been inevitable at any French officers' mess. When he perceived that none was to appear, he called to his orderly, who had followed him and was hanging around outside the door, and sent him on an errand. Then he sat down with Sproutz and Jot before a plate of thin, greasy soup.

While Renault had been speaking to the orderly, Jot had whispered something into the ear of Sproutz, but that worthy seemed to be effervescing with suppressed rage. He eyed both his companions malignantly without saying a word, and as he dallied with his soup, Renault decided that he had never met so unpleasant a man. Presently the orderly knocked at the door and entered. In his hands was something which Renault viewed with satisfaction—a dark and dusty bottle which he had been put to considerable expense to obtain. After all, he would try to be polite and relieve the strained atmosphere at the table.

He drew a corkscrew from his pocket, opened the bottle with loving care and, throwing the water in their glasses out of a nearby window, carefully decanted some of the liquid into each one. Then he raised his own, bowed with French punctilio, and said—

"Gentlemen, to hell with the Kaiser!"

Sproutz snorted, seized the bottle and sent it hurtling through the window, leaving a ruby stream behind. Jot said severely—

"Army regulations on the subject of liquors and wines in officers' messes are very strict—"

"And to hell with you!" yelled Renault, rising and stalking out.

The orderly accosted him at the door.

"Sir, I have something to tell the major—"

"Go get my flying clothes, and have Lieutenant Bronk come to the ship ready to take off," the ace ordered shortly. The orderly departed, for the major's tones did not invite discussion.

MAJOR RENAULT was still in a rage when he climbed into his Breguet and barked—

"Contact!"

Two mechanics swung the prop and the motor roared. Bronk was clambering in when Lieutenant Jot approached in flying clothes.

"I'll go with the major," he said.

"I told you to go to hell," Renault replied.

"Major Sproutz' orders," replied Jot suavely. "Insubordination— even for a great ace like you."

"Written orders?" Renault asked.

Jot's face fell. He had not thought of taking such a precaution with such a military amateur as Renault.

"Wait. I'll get an order at once," he said, hurrying away.

"All the tanks full, Sergeant?" cried Renault, above the motor's roar. "Incendiaries in all the guns?"

"One out of three, sir," replied the sergeant, who was Sprawn.

The ace growled—he should have had more incendiary bullets.

"Pardon me, sir," said Sprawn. "Have you received a letter from General Bodell?"

"Letter? No," Renault replied.

"That's strange," muttered Sergeant Sprawn.

The motor, still warm from the morning's use, was already up to seventy degrees when Renault's orderly climbed on to the step of the machine.

"I want to tell the major something," he said.

"Later," barked Renault, who saw Jot approaching at a clumsy run in his fur lined suit.

"Take out the blocks!" he yelled. "Stand away!"

With a roar the Breguet lurched forward, the tail came up and then she was off the ground.

Renault ground his teeth. It was bad enough to send him to attack a balloon in such a ship without having such an absolutely all around good for nothing slob like Jot along for ballast. He would crack that damned balloon or come down trying—that was a written order. After that he would see General Bodell. If they wanted him to attack balloons, well and good, even though that had never been his game, but he would have a new deal all around first.

Meanwhile General Bodell was sitting in his office nervously chewing a cigar. Lieutenant-colonel Dummer reclined in another chair, and breathed stertorously under the influence of an excellent lunch with the best known French accessories.

One of the telephones on the general's desk rang, and he seized the receiver and clapped it to his ear.

"General?" came a voice. "Sprawn speaking. They've sent Renault to attack a balloon near Chambrey."

"The devil!" roared the general. "How long ago?"

"Three quarters of an hour."

"He's gone, then," groaned General Bodell. "Too late to stop him now. If he's lost that way there'll be hell to pay. What'll the French say? They didn't want to let him go. Why didn't you call me sooner, Sprawn?"

"I couldn't, sir. Lieutenant Jot was fooling round."

"Too bad. But why didn't he stop here? I told him in my letter to come to me and report anything suspicious."

"I asked him. He said he hadn't got the letter, sir."

"What?" the general exploded. "Anything else to report, Sprawn? No? Goodby."

General Bodell turned and fixed Lieutenant-colonel Dummer with a steely eye.

"Colonel Dummer," he said coldly, "who did you send that letter by? Have him called in!"

During the telephone conversation Lieutenant-colonel Dummer had roused somewhat from his plethoric repose. If his face had been more susceptible to expression one might have thought that anxiety, fear, and apprehension had chased themselves across its broad, flat expense. But now all these emotions had been replaced by a firm look of conscious rectitude.

"I didn't send it by courier, sir," he replied.

"You didn't send it by courier," the general repeated slowly. "Pray tell me, how did you send it?"

"Through military channels, sir," replied Lieutenant-colonel Dummer. "As provided in Army regulations—"

"Ye gods!" howled General Bodell. "I send a letter to A saying, 'Watch B. We suspect him of treason. Keep your eyes open and report every suspicious circumstance to me. Cooperate with C. Consider every move that B makes from the standpoint of your wide experience of military aeronautics, and if you notice anything queer, or even doubtful, come to me at once.'

"Yes, I send this letter to A, and you—you fat donkey—send it to B to look over and pass on. Oh, father of our country!" He raised imploring hands to a lithograph of George Washington which some welfare worker had hung on the wall. "Why have you given me this burden to bear?"

Lieutenant-colonel Dummer was standing on his feet, a picture of soldierly obesity. The tail of his short blouse stood out behind him like that of a pointing dog.

"General Bodell," he said, with a tremor in his voice, "I have been a commissioned officer of the United States Army for seventeen years, and never before has anyone presumed to address me like that. Never, sir. Army regulations expressly state that all communications, unless otherwise stated, should be

sent through military channels. You said nothing to the contrary, so I sent the letter by that means. Furthermore, any court martial will be obliged to sustain me—"

General Bodell uttered a wild moan.

"Go!" he gasped. "You're killing me!"

Lieutenant-colonel Dummer left.

ACROSS the lines toward the balloon near Chambrey sped the Breguet bearing Major Renault and Lieutenant Bronk. Renault was still burning with rage, and he clutched the spade handle of his control stick with a vicious grip. He mused upon the pleasure that would attend tearing the stick from its base and crowning Sproutz and Jot with it . . . In the rear cockpit Bronk clung to the handle of his right hand Lewis gun with one hand, and the edge of the *tourelle* with the other as he searched the sky for enemies, and trembled a little with anticipation.

Attacking a balloon clustered about with assorted anti-aircraft cannon, flaming onion throwers and machine guns, was desperate work, even in a diving Spad. In a bi-place machine it was approximately twice as dangerous.

No, twice as dangerous is not the way to express it. At best, it was as dangerous as any individual task the war afforded. The chances, if any, of a two-seater coming off successful were only half as good as those of a Spad.

"*Woof!*" barked a six inch high explosive shell fifty yards from their right wingtips, and its dirty, ominous black smoke stood out against the clean blue sky like a gob of mud slung by a naughty boy against an immaculate white wall.

Renault thrust the stick forward slightly, and the tachometer climbed from 1700 to 1750, and the air speed indicated from 140 to 150 kilometers an hour. The following bursts were a hundred yards or more behind.

The even roar of the engine droned in the single exhaust stack above the top wing with a resonant, bell-like quality, and the wind in the wires sang softly, making a soothing duet. The balloon near Chambrey was almost directly below them.

The anti-aircraft shells continued to burst above and behind them as the methodical German gunners continued to allow for the same speed and altitude of their target which they had received from their triangulators. The speeding Breguet was almost down to two thousand meters before they suddenly woke up, and a single ranging shell burst directly before her nose. Renault spun around in a vertical bank, straightened out and put the ship into a steeper glide without retarding the motor.

It revved up to almost two thousand, roaring and vibrating. The air screeched protestingly against the tearing wires. Ahead was the clumsy bulk of the balloon. It bobbed about wildly, as the Germans tried to pull it down, and presently, one after the other, two white parachutes blossomed below it. An instant later the Breguet sped into the gauntlet of defenses which protected the precious gas bag.

Streams of tracer bullets sprang up from the earth. Renault jerked the ship suddenly sideways, throwing Bronk against the edge of his cockpit. As he hung by his belt, scrambling to regain his footing, the observer's horrified eyes beheld a string of glowing, phosphorescent balls, fastened together like a species of seaweed, reaching to hang themselves over the Breguet's left wings and send them to a hurtling, blazing death—the famous flaming onions.

Then they were level with the balloon, hardly a hundred yards away. Renault swung into a wide banked curve, pulled backward on the stick and squeezed his trigger.

"*Pom-pom-pom-pom,*" said his single Vickers—slowly, it seemed to him, after the rapid stutter of the twin guns on the Spad to which he was accustomed, and becoming still slower as the engine lost speed while he held the ship's nose up with the rudder to rake the big bag from end to end.

They might not be hit. A man might

point a loaded pistol at his head, pull the trigger and miss, also. The gun might miss fire. The Breguet's chance of escaping was about as great, but Renault did not care.

The incendiary bullets with which the gun was loaded entered the balloon at intervals of hardly more than a yard, but apparently in vain, for nothing happened. The Breguet's wings were torn and gashed by fire from the ground. Waving his left hand in a gesture of furious rage, the ace hurled the ship's nose downward, just as a stream of tracer bullets tore through her fuselage from end to end. He felt a sharp blow like a kick in the pants on the bottom of the iron seat in which he sat, and was half way round in his place to see if Bronk had been hit when he heard a reassuring sound.

It was the full throated roar of the observer's twin Lewis guns, and two steady streams of blazing bullets sped into the balloon above them. Under the impact of this concentrated fire, the great bag burst into a falling ruin of flame and black smoke.

Renault tore his eyes away from this scene just in time to pull the straining ship out of her dive and speed along, hardly ten feet above a green field of grain. At that same altitude, kicking her from side to side in quick jerks intended to be disconcerting to marksmen on the ground, he drove the roaring plane back across the lines, while Bronk sent bursts of fire at astounded Germans scuttling over the ground and into holes as fast as he could slap full drums on to his guns.

At that same altitude he thundered down the single narrow streets of Sully, and along the road which led to the flying field between two rows of poplar trees, and between two hangars before he cut the gun. When his wheels struck the ground he came around in what the French so aptly call a *cheval de bois*, or merry-go-round, and headed back across the field almost as fast as he had come. Fifty yards from the headquarters of General Bodell he cut the switch and let the tailskid bite into the ground. So nicely had he timed it that the dead propeller stopped just a foot from the general's door.

RENAULT vaulted out of his seat and landed on the lower wing. In his next leap he seized the horizontal prop and swung himself, feet foremost, through the door as if he had been performing upon a bar. And his two feet landed directly in the well filled stomach of Lieutenant-colonel Dummer. For the second time that day the colonel was grossly insulted, and he collapsed upon the floor.

The ace paid him no attention, but rushed through the three offices in the building and found them empty. Everyone had gone outside at his arrival except Dummer, and then scattered before the charge of the plane toward the door. As Renault started to rush outside again he bumped into General Bodell.

"Look here, I don't want any more of this!" the major told the general.

The general smiled and patted the major soothingly on the back.

"Come inside," he said.

"Major Sproutz threw my bottle of wine out of the window!" the major went on. "It was Pommard—"

"Sit down," invited the general. "Have a cigar. There has been an unfortunate mistake," he went on, as he closed the door.

"And what do they mean by sending me —me—to attack balloons in a Breguet?" the ace persisted.

"There has been an unfortunate mistake," admitted the general. "It was my fault only in so far as I left a detail to that overstuffed mummy out there. I'm glad to see you crowned him, but how did you happen to do it?"

"I didn't. I kicked him in the belly," Renault explained.

"Better and better," said the general approvingly. "So Sproutz threw your bottle of wine out of the window? No doubt you are thirsty." He called an orderly and gave orders.

A few minutes later the affair had been arranged satisfactorily, and the general took up the thread of conversation once more.

"Here was the situation," he said. "I have suspected Sproutz and Jot of being up to something treacherous for some time, but couldn't get anything definite. Sproutz was born in the States of German parents, educated largely in Germany, enlisted in our Army, took an examination for a commission, advanced to a majority since the war, and there he is.

"Jot is a naturalized citizen, enlisted, was an excellent non-com, and got his commission after the war started. Their being German, or of German parentage, is nothing against them—many of our best officers and men are the same. Some of the best men in the French army are Alsatians." Renault nodded.

"However, various suspicious items have come to my attention about Sproutz and Jot. Sproutz ruined the morale of a flying school by inflicting senseless, unnecessary hardships upon the cadets, and the percentage of casualties there was staggering. Jot delayed important construction and requisitions by a silly insistance on correct spelling, phrasing and punctuation in communications. But we had nothing definite. Other officers have done similar things." Again Renault nodded acquiescence.

"Well, we've had intelligence men over at Grenouillere watching them, particularly Sergeant Sprawn, an excellent detective, but he knows very little about flying. I had Paris send you there because you have had more practical experience in war flying than any other officer in the Army. You were a bombing pilot before you transferred to *chasse*, and I thought you might be able to put your finger on something."

"I sent you a letter telling you to keep your eyes open, run no risks, and report anything that looked at all fishy to me at once. And I told that misbegotten fool, Dummer, to see that you got the letter, and he sent it to you by military channels through Sproutz."

"He was trying to get me killed," said Renault angrily. "But why did Jot try to go with me, then, if they're working together?"

"The hell he did!" exclaimed the general. "Hum. Perhaps he intended to shoot you himself and then fly the ship back—the skunks. But what can I do now?" he pondered. "Of course I can relieve them from duty there, but they're good officers technically, and it's no crime in the Army to be a fool. They'd just get another command. Of course it's barely possible that Sproutz isn't pro-German, after all. He might have been trying to get you bumped off out of petty spite because you were sent there to watch him. Such things have been done."

"He threw my bottle of wine out of the window when I said, 'To hell with the Kaiser!' " snarled Renault.

"He did!" exclaimed the general. "The devil! That would seem . . . But as evidence . . . Of course, Army regulations—" He rose and paced furiously back and forth as an aid to thought.

OUTSIDE, a patrol of Spads took off, one by one. Renault listened hungrily to the sharp, staccato bark of their Hispano-Suiza motors, which sounded more aggressive than the reliable, but ox-like rumble of the Breguets. The private telephone jangled and General Bodell snatched the receiver.

"Yes?" he snapped.

The voice of Sergeant Sprawn crackled over the wire so distinctly that Renault could hear every word.

"General? Sprawn speaking. Major Sproutz and Lieutenant Jot are leading a raid on Conmedy. Jot took two briefcases in the plane with him!"

"Briefcases!" shouted General Bodell.

"Yes, sir. And another thing. Major Renault's orderly was mooning around wondering what to do about something he'd seen, and he heard me talking to you. He'd tried to tell Renault, but didn't get a chance. It seems that Jot has been carrying one landing flare among his

bombs, and nobody could figure out what for. This orderly saw him take the parachute out of the case and put a bunch of papers in instead."

"So that's what they've been up to," muttered the general. "No wonder the Germans know so much! How long have they been gone?"

"About an hour, sir," was the reply.

"An hour! Why in hell didn't you let me know sooner?"

"I couldn't, General," was the reply. "Lieutenant Jot had me arrested and put into the guardhouse before he left. The sergeant of the guard is a bonehead, and wouldn't let me out. The officer of the guard is flying, and the officer of the day's drunk. I had to have a fit so they'd call the medical officer before I could get hold of anybody who'd listen to reason and let me out."

"All right. Too bad, but not your fault, Sprawn. Anything else?"

"No, sir."

General Bodell clicked the receiver back on to the hook and turned to Renault.

"Did you hear?" he asked.

"Did he say briefcases?" the ace asked.

"Yes."

"Then they *are* Germans! They know the game's up and they must be going to land. And I'll bet they'll take the whole squadron with them!"

The two men looked at each other in distressed thoughtful silence for a moment. Renault's was the obvious conclusion. Both realized what that conclusion would mean.

A major of the fledgling United States Air Service leading his whole squadron to death, or ignominious capture, depending on the actions of his followers. Beside the material loss, it would be a blow to the morale of Americans and Allies alike. Why, it would make the American Flying Corps into a joke!

Into the silence came an intermittent pulsing sound, the motors of a flight of bombers at high altitude. It spurred them into action.

"Damnation! There they go now," growled General Bodell.

Springing to his feet, he snatched a pair of binoculars from the wall and rushed outside. Far up in the sky at an altitude of between four and five thousand meters, which it had taken them the best part of an hour to attain, seven heavy bombing planes in V formation were churning steadily toward Germany.

"Send a flight of Spads to protect them and bring them back," said Renault.

"There's nobody here; the last flight just took off," groaned the general in reply.

"Ask the French," the ace suggested hopefully.

"We couldn't afford it," the general replied. "We'd look like two big fools. If we admitted the fix we're in they'd lose what little faith in us they have, and wouldn't let us have any more ships. But there's two new Spads in the hangar," he added suddenly.

"Let's go!" barked the ace. "Give orders!"

The general didn't resent the major's tone of command, which should be added to the evidence proving him to be a peculiar general. His voice boomed out and the field leaped into action like a broken wasp's nest, and in two minutes the Spads sat side by side on the line with their propellers revolving slowly. A captain, the operations officer, had come up on the jump.

"Gas up the patrols the minute they come in and send them to Conmedy to look for the Breguet bombers in trouble," the general told him, as he struggled into his flying suit. "How are they—warm yet?" he asked an M. S. E. who was in the cockpit of the nearest Spad.

"Three minutes more, sir," the noncom replied.

"Gassed up and full of oil?"

"Yes, sir."

"Guns loaded and ready?"

"Yes, sir—one in three tracers," said an armament corporal.

"No. 3 reported to heat up at low altitude," a sergeant spoke up.

"We won't be at low altitude long," returned the general grimly. "Come on, Renault."

As they shuffled toward the ships in their fur lined suits and flying boots, a bulky figure came out of a barrack building and blocked their path. It was Lieutenant-colonel Dummer, and he had a sheaf of papers in his hand.

"Sir," he said, saluting the general punctiliously in a most military manner, "I have here a list of charges against Major Renault—"

The general pushed him roughly aside and climbed into his ship, while Renault took the remaining No. 3. He noted that his thermometer registered 65° and, after running up the motor, he motioned the chocks away from the wheels, roared tail up across the field and took the air. With one eye on the climbing thermometer needle, he poked her nose up and to the north and climbed like a car in first. The general followed him, but lost ground, or rather, air, steadily. Forgotten, as was the fate of observers, Bronk watched their departure wistfully.

FULL OUT, with the lust for battle in his veins and the stench of oil in his nose, the ace took after the man who had, among other things, thrown his bottle of wine out of the window. When he crossed the German lines at two thousand meters and still climbing, his thermometer read 90°, and was also going up. But the temperature of the atmosphere at that altitude was much lower, and that had its effect. The ace trusted that it would, otherwise he might visit Germany himself. After reaching 95°, the indicator fell to 90° and remained there.

The enemy anti-aircraft gunners greeted the lone Spad enthusiastically, but Renault paid no great attention, except to vary his course ever so slightly when the sinister black bursts came too close. He had no time for unnecessary maneuvers; in fact, he feared that even at best he would not arrive in time to be of any use. The bombers had too great a start, and things happen fast at speeds of a hundred miles an hour and upward.

And as for being of any use, he was still wondering what he could do, as he neared Conmedy. Of course the obvious thing was to shoot down Sproutz and Jot, preferably in flames, and lead the other bombers home. Yes, an excellent scheme it sounded, but there were difficulties in the way.

Suppose he were to charge down on the formation of bombers, shooting at their leader. If they did not shoot *him*, it would be a matter of very great luck indeed, considering that he would be the sole target of fourteen machine guns. Even if he succeeded in bringing down the two Germans and escaped with his life, that wouldn't help him to save the other bombers, who would have nothing to do with him, except from behind the sights of their Lewises.

He might join the bombers in an open and friendly manner, showing his insignia carefully to prove that he was a friend and a brother, and then suddenly attack Sproutz and Jot, provided Jot did not become suspicious and bump him off first. But even so, he would be very fortunate indeed if he escaped the vengeance of the rest of the formation; and they certainly would not follow him home. Scattered and bewildered, the Breguets would hardly be able to escape from so great a distance in Germany. If only they had wireless telephone communication between planes in the air, such as he had read about.

At five thousand meters he spotted the formation of Breguets ahead, almost over Conmedy, which they had come to attack. He had not located them before, because there was no Archie fire in the sky, and that was what he had been looking for. But very likely the Germans on the ground were wise, and were letting them into the web as nicely and easily as possible. Then he saw other smaller ships, escorting the bombers on their way about a quarter of a mile above and to their right. These rapidly resolved themselves into a flight of ten Fokkers.

In case of any mixup, they were ready to try to clean up the Americans. If Sproutz and Jot could lead their men so far into

Germany that their gas ran out and they had to land intact, that would be the neatest possible solution. But if any slip up occurred, the Fokkers were ready to do their stuff.

In a tight, staggered V formation, with each ship protecting the other, it was certain the Breguets would have an even chance against the Fokkers. But if the bombers were scattered, they would be easy meat. One by one the Fokkers would swarm around and shoot them down. Renault had a nebulous plan, and a dangerous one, but it was the best he could do. He was not in a cheerful mood now. There are few things so annoying as the prospect of being shot by one's own men.

Slowly the ace eased his ship along above the Breguets, ostentatiously flipping up his wings to show the American *cocardes* as he approached. The bombing observers watched him anxiously with fingers itching on their triggers. Tales of dirty work done by Germans in Spads captured from the French in the Marne salient had come to their ears. But they held their fire.

Renault throttled down farther and assumed a place fifty yards above and behind Jot and Sproutz. Looking down, he perceived that the adjutant's guns were pointing directly at him, and he had time to anticipate how their bullets would feel tearing up through his body. He could not stand much of that, and doing nothing.

He wondered where the general was, and what he would do if he arrived. Now was a good chance for him to do something, for every man in the bombing formation had his suspicious eyes fixed on this single Spad. It puzzled them why a lone Spad should suddenly show up so far in Germany.

Renault felt that he must act. He could not bear sitting there and waiting for a stream of bullets much longer. There was not even a comforting iron seat under him as there had been in the Breguet. Also the Fokkers seemed to be suspiciously edging closer.

THE ACE eased his engine down a little more and stalled back and down between the No. 4 and No. 5 Breguets in the V of the formation So, at least, he would have his engine between him and Jot. Now, if he could get the bombing men to recognize him, and Jot didn't shoot, he might be able to accomplish something. But why didn't Jot shoot?

That was what Jot himself was wondering. But on the whole it seemed to the crafty little adjutant like taking the bull by the horns prematurely. The Breguets were steadily driving onward into Germany. Before long they would not have enough gas left to get out; every minute was against them. It would be a cleaner job if they all landed without gas and helpless, rather than in a desperate fight to escape, in which many ships on both sides would be destroyed. Jot did not know who this goggled Spad pilot was, or what he was trying to do, but his gas supply was even shorter than the Breguets. The adjutant had no reason to believe that the man in the Spad was itching to shoot him down.

Meanwhile the minds of the bombing flyers were in a turmoil. Why was Sproutz leading them on into Germany like this? They had just dropped their bombs and been expecting to turn back at the moment when this strange Spad appeared, and now they had done nothing. Who was the Spad, and why? The convoying flight of Fokkers was not reassuring. They knew it would be fatal to break up and desert their leader. That would be meat for the hovering German pursuit ships. And so, with every one worried, the American ships tooled on, ever farther from home and safety.

Renault eased down into the middle of the formation carefully. He could manage it at five thousand meters, where the greater wing spread of the Breguets gave them an advantage. Lower down he might have stalled trying not to overrun them.

Level with No. 4 and No. 5, he slipped up his goggles and grinned to left and

right in turn. The bombers grinned in recognition and reply, and made signals, trying to find out what to do; but Renault was stumped.

What would the others do if he dived on Sproutz and Jot and shot them down? That was the question, and it was weighing more and more on Jot, too. Sproutz, in the front seat, was motioning at him angrily. Above all, the adjutant wanted to save his own hide. He fixed the little red ball of his windvane directly on the nose of the Spad, and looked at it through the inner ring of his sight.

Perhaps there was telepathic communication between him and Renault. In a tight place in the air, men's nerves tightened, and their senses seemed sharpened. At any rate, the two men resolved on action simultaneously.

The ace shifted slightly in his seat, fitted his feet on to the rudder with great care, and took new grips on the trigger, his stick and the throttle. He could not wait; his gas was getting low.

Jot slowly tightened his forefinger on the trigger of his right hand gun, the rest of his hand on that of the other. One double burst must do it all. If this Spad started signaling to the other bombers, they might turn and follow him, instead of their original leaders.

But a split instant before either fired there was a roar of twin machine guns, and Jot collapsed backward, his guns spraying lead and phosphorous wildly into the air. Two streams of tracer and service bullets were tearing into the belly of the Breguet, and several had riddled him. More reached the unprotected lower tank and a burst of smoke billowed out and to the rear. The bomber fell off on her right wing and started earthward, burning, with a small pursuit ship on her tail, still firing.

"The general!" thought Renault. "And he got here just in time."

He shot his Spad forward into the leading position which Sproutz and Jot had vacated, and moved his arm in a sweeping left gesture. Then he started a wide turn, away from the herding Fokkers. But they had seen the fall of the leading bomber, and were coming on.

Turning to No. 2 ship in the bombing formation, Renault waved him onward into the leading position, steadily driving his own plane forward to give him place. Being on the inside of the turn, the Breguet easily drew ahead of the others into the place. The bombing flyers were very vague indeed as to what it was all about, but here a Moses had appeared to lead them out of the wilderness into which they had been heading.

Already Renault had swept up into an Immelmann turn. At its top the first of the swooping Fokkers came before his sights; the Vickers roared and the German swung away and down. Then an epic dog fight began.

Still outnumbered nine to one, the ace had no time to try to down another enemy. All he could do was to avoid those he could and trust the others to get in one anothers' way. Sooner or later one would come before his sights, provided he did not get in front of one of their's first.

One was coming, he saw from the corners of his eyes. Automatically his hand closed and the German ran into a line of lead.

By this time the bombers had completed their turn and were headed home in tight, fighting formation. They were now well above the *chasse* machines, which had lost altitude in their maneuvers.

Renault's brain clicked rapidly but coolly, while his hands and feet worked instinctively; and the Spad did things which would have startled many a man who considers himself a finished stunt pilot. A man isn't an ace for nothing.

"No use trying to kill off eight more Germans. The bombers were organized now. A new deal is in order."

Renault started the Spad into a dive for safety which no lighter Fokker could hope to hold and keep its wings. Then he pulled out and into an upward zoom almost as fast.

A flaming Fokker passed at which he had not fired, and overhead a dozen ships

milled furiously around one another's tails. From the south sped two or three more Spads to join the fun. By the time the ace got there, the four remaining German ships were limping hastily away.

Back at the field at Sully they landed one by one, the bombers, too, for they lacked gas to make the field at Grenouillere. General Bodell met them, and his explanations and orders were few but firm. His most important order was—

"Gas up those two Spads!" Then he turned to Major Renault.

"Major," he remarked, "the results of today's action, and consequent recommendations must be taken to Paris immediately. I wish you to come along." He winked. "If we start at once we'll easily make it before dark."

"Right," said Renault. "Café de Paris, and Henri's first for cocktails?"

"Both good ideas," agreed the general. A stout form almost bumped into him as he turned around.

"Sir," said Lieutenant-colonel Dummer, "here are the charges against Major Renault. He should be placed under arrest."

The general reached out and sharply tweaked the nose of Lieutenant-colonel Dummer between his forefinger and thumb.

"Let's go," he said to the ace.

Whereupon those two peculiar officers climbed once more into the Spads and headed for Paris, three hundred kilometers away.

FINE SLEEPING POINTS

By

Oscar H. *Roesner*

AFTER a hard day with his bovine charges, a tired California cowboy dropped off to sleep with his mouth open. Singing and searching came a hungry, poison laden mosquito. Noting the tempting red tongue in the gaping orifice of the sleeper Mr. Mosquito settled upon it and began to drill for his favorite nectar, at the same time depositing poisonous germs from his busy bill.

Like many a famous one in history's pages, the cowboy awoke too late. The enemy was upon him and the harm done. A severe illness followed.

When he recovered, the cowboy sought compensation through the State industrial accident commission. He was awarded $1,957 for hospital charges, $227 as back pay, and $12.50 a week for disability.

Carried into the courts, the State supreme court held the indemnity insurance company liable to the cowboy's employers for the full amount, though it tried to get out of paying on the grounds that a cowboy asleep was not employed, and that if he slept with his mouth open, thereby giving poisonous night marauders an easy opening for attack, he was not entitled to damages.

So you see that courts may consider other fine points in giving decisions on bills than those on the bills of mosquitoes. And the cowboy may go to sleep and still be employed, and he may sleep with his mouth open and yet get pay for any damage done within it.

"Many a white man has bought himself into the nobility by stealing diamonds from the blacks—"

A GENTLEMAN'S GAME

By FERDINAND BERTHOUD

DODGING and stumbling, the man crashed on, thorns scratching him, rocks tripping and bruising him. Careless of anything but distance, he fled frantically on. In the rush frightened things scuttered past him; but his ears were for nothing but that which might come from the rear. Breathless, at last he stopped and listened. Not even the echo of far voices came over the thin night air.

For a moment the man slumped beside a rock and fought to piece things together. They would take up his spoor at daybreak for a certainty, and a man in the African bush without a horse would be lost. That he could sell his life dearly, however, was something; and, smiling, he counted his cartridges. Then his body lost its heat; the dripping sweat grew cold. He had but six cartridges; the remainder were back in his saddlebags.

Reaching his holster, he clutched his replaced revolver. There must be five more there. Still colder, he drew the gun. The reason of the kick and the bruise gleamed as a too close fire.

The hammer of the gun had been shot clean away.

Returning the useless thing, the man felt inside his shirt. Strapped round him still was a belt. They could not shoot that from him. In grim satisfaction he fondled the soft leather, and looked back at five prison years. The diamonds inside the belt, in part, would pay for those. Diamonds? Money?

With a jump he came back from his dream and, searching the sky, mapped a definite course. He must leave the protection of the line of *kopjes* he was skirting, but the density of the bush would take its place. More leisurely, but determined on distance, he moved at a walk on to the level.

For hours the man kept on; the moon swung overhead toward midnight. Almost unthinking, he covered mile after mile, then, past endurance, commenced muttering and cursing his luck.

Things had gone rottenly! Why had that lousy Musters left De Beers and the trapping of illicit diamond buyers and come to Rhodesia and joined the British South African Police as an inspector and got after him again? What for? Just to worry him? Was he, Linn Bryant, hoodooed, that Fate should dog him like this?

Certainly Musters had only trapped him like the rest, but the devil had done it dirtily. Guilty? Of course he was, but when he could not catch him in the act of buying stolen diamonds why should he drop loose stones into his pockets and rope him in? Why?

Five years they had given him for that. Five dead, black years. This time, if they caught him, it would be ten.

And it had been only a gentleman's crime he had committed at first—a gentleman's game—at that. Had not many a respected millionaire, and even knight hobnobbing with society, started his upward career by buying stolen diamonds?

That prison sentence had broken his spirit, steel brained guards crushed his self-respect— Oh, hell! He would take toll for it all!

Kill Musters? You bet he would! Rip him to pieces if ever he got him alone. Torture him.

True enough, the tiny safe and the dynamiting of it this time was so easy as to be a joke—he could not have resisted doing it even had he wanted to. In these ox wagon and coach days no company so far out on the veldt as Belingwe could expect to store its valuables in a bank. That would be silly.

Danger? Difficult? Now the bad word was all over the country, runners had warned every farmer, store and kraal, and he dare not ask for assistance or even use the road. And, damn it, he had no horse!

Use the road? What else? Such *biltong* and other food as he could snatch when he started out were back with the dead horse and the carbine. What next? Just days of ever weakening battle and slow starvation?

And at daybreak they would pick up his spoor. Curse that gimlet eyed bushman tracker. He would like to torture him too!

Once more he came to himself and for a moment sat and rested, then was up and on again—while darkness lasted pushing on.

Hiding by day, for three nights the rout lasted. Lips cracking, head pounding, throat burning, he fought a querulous way. Soon hunger harried him, terror gripped him, till his very soul screamed food.

Food! Food! Food! He must have food! At worst he would swap diamonds for food!

As he awoke on the fourth evening his tired eyes saw buildings in the far distance. Buildings? A farm? Buildings where there was food?

Terrific risk? Yes, but food! Food!

Wearily he arose and stepped out into the open. Over there was alluring food.

THE BUSHMAN tracker gained the top of the rise, looked with piercing eyes to the far horizon, scanned the wide veldt below him. Away in the distance were scattered buildings, in the short twilight showing as but a shadowy patch. The keen eyes flashed about, came to trees closer in, to a standing man.

A white man . . .

The bushman uttered a splitting yell and the man by the trees caught it and turned. Instantly, and in full view, the man was away. Weariness and the craving for food were things that might never have been. Over the rise horses were picking their way, a small band of police, widely spread, advancing. The man at their head spelt trouble incarnate.

Bryant bounded for the nearest deep bush and, at an angle, shot up the hill. Directly before them in the plain he would be distinct; on a level with them he might get away in the scant few minutes until dark.

On his ears snapped short, sharp orders. Bryant knew that metallic voice.

"Got him! Go farther up the rise, Mdlodlo, and see if you can cut him off. Hurry, rat! *Cuchima!* When you see him shout and tell us. We'll ride ahead and drive him in."

"*Yehbo, Inkoos,*" came back. "I catch the snake, *mij baas.*"

A snake? He, a white man, a snake?

Crouching, Bryant raced from bush to bush, and twisted and ducked for cover. Thorns ripped him, blood spurted, but his only thought was the longing for night. For a full mile, ever rising, he crashed, then commenced to slow. Hoofs grating on loose stones were nearing. The sun was gone. If he could but manage it.

At his side was the dread padding of bare feet, and the feet were fast approaching. A scant two hundred yards more and the race inevitably were done. Of a sudden over a lower bush loomed a patch of unusually tall timber. Perhaps he could beat them yet. Thinking quickly, he darted for the heaven sent trees.

Bryant's hands slipped inside his shirt and shaking fingers fumbled at a buckle. The belt with the diamonds came loose and he ripped it out. The trees were right before him and he skirted them—took one fearful look over his shoulder and all about. A lightning glance to impress a picture of the trees; a mental fingerprint. Some clue. Then, whizzing and twisting, the belt hurtled into the undergrowth. They should not get that, whatever else.

Sick and stumbling, the man blundered on.

The padding feet curved after him, horses clattered everywhere. Clubbed useless gun in one hand, the other hand clutching his knife, he faltered to a limp. The bushman's breath hissed audibly.

"*M'satinyoka!*" came from behind.

The white man slashed around, the knife hand swinging up. His bleeding lips were tight, his firm teeth clenched. The weapon never struck. Bryant's eyes bored into a gun but twenty feet away.

"Drop it!" an iron voice shot. "Put 'em up!"

Musters got down from his horse, the dread gun never wavering. As unconcerned, he stepped close to the man and stood in front of him.

"Move away from your gun, Bryant," he commanded. "Put your hands behind you and turn round. You damn' fool!"

Not moving, Bryant eyed him doggedly. Reaction and hopelessness had dulled his brain.

"Damn' fool?" he growled, and his empty hands twitched. "I'll tear your heart out for this, Musters!"

That man reached over and spun him round.

"You'd like to. Ten years from now there'll be time to talk about that. You're a rotten thief!"

"Now—" Bryant started, but the ominous handcuffs clicked. "Now—" then, trembling, he stopped.

At a call the scattered police came trotting in, the bushman, grinning victoriously, collected knife and gun. Musters untied a halter rope and fastened it to

the handcuffs. As the man obviously was weak and starving it looked as if he were rubbing it in. The full darkness of night had come.

"Here, Mdlodlo," he said, and gave an end of the rope to the happy bushman. "You trot ahead with Baas Bryant and we'll keep close to you. I've felt in his hip pockets, the real search we'll make in better light. You know the farmhouse we saw from the hill, Mdlodlo? That's Jackson's, and it's deserted. We'll stay there over night. Move along!"

Deserted? Bryant's aching mind suddenly pondered. And the food he thought was there had brought the handcuffs.

Beaten, he turned dejectedly to the inspector.

"Musters, I'm all in and starving. You know that. Any of you fellows got a drink?"

Totally unsympathetic, Musters laughed.

"When you get to Jackson's you'll find a nice cold well, Bryant. You'll need to get accustomed to water again. Trot on!"

"I'll kill—!" Bryant's dry tongue sought to mutter. But the bushman's shove sent him staggering across the sand.

MUSTERS hunted up a broken box and placed it against a wall for a seat; the others brought in saddles and blankets and placed them round the room. In the center crouched the prisoner, eyes brighter, but stomach still calling. A good natured corporal had handed him a flask, but the liquor only intensified the emptiness. A fire, being built by the bushman in an open grate, gave the only light.

Musters groped in a saddlebag, then held out a rebuking hand.

"You are an idiot, Bryant, to go and steal in this country where there's so much for all of us. Bound to get caught in the end in any case. But you'll not need the diamonds now—not in jail. Where have you stowed 'em? Next your skin?"

Bryant stared at him venomously and gave a mocking laugh.

"Diamonds? Find 'em," he advised. "Finish your own dirty work. Search me and find 'em!"

Better humored, almost teasing, Musters waved his hand.

"Don't be silly, Bryant. It's too late now. Where are they?"

"Find 'em," the other invited.

Musters beckoned to the good natured corporal.

"Go through this bashful gentleman, Stiffy. Be careful not to tickle him; he's very girlish. The gun I put back in his holster can stay there. It's bust. Bryant, stand up."

More readily than necessary the man arose and his tired face carried a biting smile. His fettered hands sought to assist. In pockets, in shirt, in hat, the corporal felt, then stooped to unlace the boots. Musters' happy smile vanished.

"Where are they, Bryant?" he demanded. "Throw his boots over here, Stiffy, and let me examine 'em. Take his socks off! Make him talk if you can't find them."

Quite willingly Bryant spoke.

"Find what, Musters? You keep on yapping about diamonds. You haven't told me why you've been chasing me yet. Why all the fuss?"

Instantly furious, Musters jumped to his feet.

"If I weren't decent and didn't obey orders I'd smash you! You know damned well what diamonds we're after. The diamonds you stole from the dynamited Belingwe safe. Where are they?"

Stubbornly, Bryant eyed him.

"Find out!"

Musters backed and sat down against his wall, for but half of his quest was accomplished. Bryant still stood, and his cold eyes taunted, for he knew quite well the trouble he had caused.

"Bryant," Musters commenced, and emphasized each word with a jerking finger, "you've as much chance of bluffing me as you'll have of cutting holes through prison walls with a sheet of paper.

You blew that safe at Belingwe, and you got away with a month's output. Don't lie! I took your fingerprints back in Kimberley, I have fresh ones now from down below. You infernal idiot! There were as many fingerprints on that safe as if a human centipede had crawled over it. Come on. Where are the stones?"

As a parrot Bryant repeated—

"Find out!"

For an instant Musters was silent, then, to Bryant's reasoning, the cause of his fury was unmasked.

"Look here, Bryant," he said. "You may as well make it as easy as possible for yourself. You'll get your ten years, diamonds or not. Let me tell you something more— There's a thousand pound reward for the return of those stones. Produce them, and I'll do all I can to make your sentence light."

Bryant lifted his head and laughed.

"You do anything to help? Your influence is about as great with any court as it is with me. Go to hell!"

Again the inspector was silent and his glance went to the bushman, now playing at replenishing the fire. The native had been listening intently, for his small store of wisdom lately had been added to by the knowledge that many things could be bartered for with coins.

"Mdlodlo," he said, knowing that being searched by a bushman was about as great an insult as could be offered a white, "you're a pretty good tracker. Hurry up and search through Bass Bryant's clothes and see if you can track any diamonds. They're worth a thousand pounds."

"*Lungali*," the bushman answered.

But he may as well have searched for the Star of India.

"Very well, Bryant," Musters said uglily. "When I return to Belingwe I'll carry those stones—or something else—that you can gamble. I'll find some means of making you produce them. In the morning I'll know where they are."

Bryant sneered.

"You will, eh? Kid yourself you're a magician? Like blazes, you will!"

THE BUSHMAN looked in through an empty window frame. The fire was dim and dying, the policeman on watch snoring. The prisoner, wrists still handcuffed behind his back, lay sleeping, weary almost to death. The good natured corporal, he noted, had not replaced the boots he had taken off Bryant to search.

The native stripped a filthy rag from his loins then, stealthy as a wild beast, crept in and stood looking down at the manacled man. Baas Musters had said the diamonds he had stolen were worth a thousand pounds, and a thousand pounds would barter for much. A thousand was infinitely more than he or even ten of him could count. Baas Bryant must have dropped the diamonds as he ran. Why should he not find them and get the money from Baas Musters? Or keep the diamonds and get away? He had better take the boots far outside first, though, and come back and get the prisoner.

The bushman returned, came in and sized up the man. Though much bigger than himself, this man's hands were fastened; he would not unlock them with the key he had stolen at the police post at Belingwe unless he must. Quick as a leopard striking, he was down and had the rag bound tightly round Bryant's mouth and head, a knee holding him still and preventing any great struggle.

Slung over his shoulder, and creeping past the policemen, the native carried Bryant out. Bearing him a hundred yards away, he reached the place where the boots were planted.

The native dropped Bryant clumsily and squatted close beside him. Grunting, he took the boots and began to pull them on. Bryant could not resist. Wide awake as ever in his life, he already had pieced things together. The man who was carrying him had naked feet—he was the bushman. It was the beginning of some diabolical scheme. On the thorny ground boots would save agony untold. Musters had set the native on to torture him—make him talk. If any inquiry

were made, Musters would put the blame wholly on the native. A deputized third degree.

The boots were on, the rag about his head now stifling. Shaking his head and gasping, Bryant sought to make his inquisitor understand. Powerful hands gripped him and jerked him to his feet. A cutting point pierced the skin over his ribs.

"*Hamba!* Walk, Baas Bryant!" an emotionless voice ordered. "We go get the diamonds, Baas."

For just one second Bryant hesitated, and strained to stand quite still. The point seemed to grind into him.

"*Hamba!* Baas Bryant," the native said again.

Half suffocated, Bryant moved on. In not so many minutes the gagging rag would kill him, and that would be better than what was in store. If the bushman would only remove the cloth, take the knife away . . .

At last the native's sharp ears caught the choking and he stopped. The house was nearly a mile in their rear, and the prisoner would not be likely to call for help. The bandage came off, and Bryant looked up to the moon and took deep breaths.

"*Hamba!*" The bushman, without waiting, once more prodded.

Bryant winced and jerked ahead, his lungs not yet working properly.

"You damned rat!" he managed to get out, then cursed brokenly as he stumbled.

The bushman did not murmur. Bryant's lungs were pumping more freely. Risking the knife, he jumped to one side and faced the other.

"What's the idea, Mdlodlo?" he said, frightened but furious. "What do you think you're doing? There are no diamonds anywhere around here. This game of Musters' isn't any use."

The bushman stood close up to him, the knife making pinpricks in his chest. The meaning of half the words did not sink in.

"Diamonds, Bass Bryant. Diamonds. The Baas hide the diamonds. Baas Bryant not find the diamonds I kill him, tell Baas Musters he run away."

"That's kind," Bryant commented.

It was no use planning, he could see. He was cornered. But he was not going to talk, even if he could not escape. Something—anything—must be done.

Bryant kicked out with all his strength and the bushman uttered a yell. A root caught Bryant's heel and he fell to the ground.

Like a wounded wildcat the native was upon him, mauling and striving to tear. The knife cut shallow patterns, elbows prodded ribs and chest, fingers gouged at the corners of eyes.

Bryant shrieked in pain, and the cry but increased the fury of the struggle. Death was a thing desirable—but not this kind of death. The prisoner fought for time.

"Get off, Mdlodlo! Stop it! If you kill me Baas Musters won't get his diamonds. If you hurt my eyes I can't show you. Get off!"

THE NATIVE jumped up and stood ready. Tortured to exhaustion, Bryant lay and searched his throbbing brain. Against the skyline a mile or so in the distance loomed the belt of trees. The native impatiently cursed.

"Get up, *m'satinyoka.* Dog, I kill you! Where the diamonds?"

Bryant knew the uselessness of it, but countered.

"How can I get up when I'm handcuffed, Mdlodlo? How can I get the diamonds? Unlock me, and I will."

The bushman's grimace was evil.

"I unlock baas, he run away."

Unlock him? Bryant suddenly wondered. By a miracle the black devil did have a key? The very first blind shot had accidentally scored a bullseye in a naive, unprepared, ignorant mind. Involuntarily he had told what he could do. What further terror had Musters planned in letting him have a key?

Still on his back, Bryant peered up at the native. His eyes were filmed with tears.

"You unlock?" he taunted. "You couldn't if you wanted, snake! You're just a lizard—you're nothing. Police don't trust keys to carrion."

Instantly offended, and his pride hurt, the childish native forgot himself.

"I have got key!" he asserted. "Baas Musters say I good boy. I best boy. Say I take key."

"You're a dirty liar!" the white man told him. "He wouldn't even let you lick his boots. You haven't got a key."

The bushman turned his back and, like a monkey, picked and fumbled at a strip of rag. As he turned back a tiny thing glinted in the moonlight.

"*Nangu, baas!* There it is." He showed his stolen treasure.

"Rubbish! Rot!" Bryant derided. "That thing isn't a key at all, and even if it were it wouldn't fit."

The bushman stooped down and jerked him over, and with the jerk the man rolled and came to his knees. The native still held the knife, but it was turned away. Exultingly he forced the key into a handcuff and worked it, thinking he would try it and yet hold it closed.

"It is key, Baas Bryant," he insisted. "Listen it move."

Bryant felt the key move the catch, felt a looseness; five years familiarity with handcuffs for once was a boon. A wrist bunched and knotted so that the handcuff would not easily tighten. A wrench, and one hand was free.

Bryant was on his feet as from a spring and the pair of handcuffs was flailing, closed fists punching and smashing the hard headed bushman like a collection of thunderbolts well trained. The native never had known or used a clenched fist in his life, and the furious onslaught staggered him. His arms went up to guard his face, and his frightened eyes gleamed. Three times he slashed wildly with the knife then, squealing, made to run. Whining, he collapsed and squirmed.

Mad and intent on murder, Bryant bent and kept up the terrific bombardment. He kicked and booted the native from head to foot. The bushman lay still and senseless, and Bryant aimed a final kick.

"Curse it," he muttered, and stood off. "And it's only another man's deputy! But I'd like to kill him over again. If that carcass there only were Musters the diamonds could go spinning to hell!"

The sky was clouding, but moonlight shone on the fallen key. Moonlight also picked out the knife. A twist, and the second cuff was off. Away among the tall trees half an hour later, the belt back around his waist, Bryant took a last turn in the direction of the farmhouse. A bleeding fist shook, clenched teeth gritted. Scratches and knife wounds burned.

"You're next, Mr. Musters," Bryant grated, "if I have to pay for it with my life."

With scarcely a moment's rest Bryant resumed his interrupted flight. The bushman undoubtedly was out, but without him they would again easily pick up his spoor. His hurrying boots made too clear a track. Why could it not rain? It ought to rain. It now must be a little after midnight; he would have five or six hours start. But what was the use of that without a horse? And this time the charge would be murder.

At a trot he chose a wholly different direction, through country where the ground was harder. In the back of his mind his destination was the border, the Transvaal and safety — perhaps. But anywhere away from Musters, anywhere. That cursed bloodhound had a doubly revengeful scent now.

For an hour the man hastened on then, tiring, slowed to a walk. The false strength caused by the excitement was ebbing, his storm swept brain becoming more calm. With the calm came a fresh calamity. He had no hat. He was as a Kaffir. Now, even a native who had not been notified to be on the watch for him would guess that he was a fugitive. And the scratches and cuts were fire.

The slow walk slackened to a dawdle, the dawdle almost to a complete stop. Hunger again agonized him—his stomach

was beginning to pain. They had not fed him; they had tortured him, the devils. Had bantered him. But for a scrap of *biltong* thrown to him by the good natured corporal he still starved.

The air became heavier, the night soon was pitch dark. Stumbling and tripping, he blindly staggered along. At the foot of a tree a stump caught him and, sobbing, he fell and lay flat. Damn 'em! They could catch him, if they liked. He could not go on.

For a while he lay there drowsing and drooling, then something cold seemed to be making a spatter. Opening his eyes and reaching out a hand he tried to convince himself it was not a dream. It was raining—raining! The second shower of the rainy season—and it would wash away his tracks and destroy his spoor!

Refreshed, Bryant got up. More distance before daybreak must be covered. Ere the sun rose he was deep in tangled bush and, though soaked, sleeping easily as a child.

For three days more he kept going, till the terror soon edged close to insanity. Food! Food! Again food! Even the singing insects screeched *food!* Twice he crept longingly from bush to bush close to the doors of far outlying farmhouses, and at one heard jesting talk about his doom.

"A thousand reward," a man said. "I'd be happy to give a thousand myself to rid the land of such vile scum as he!"

Vile scum?

But food! He must have food!

On the morning of the fourth day he threw a whizzing stick among a covey of partridges. One fell with a broken wing. Looking down at the plucked and opened bird, after failing to make a fire Kaffir fashion, the man's stomach retched at the thought of raw flesh. Food? Yes, there was food!

Curse Musters! No, bless Musters! Hang it! He was batty! He would murder Musters! No, he would kneel before Musters—for food!

Food! God! He *must* have food!

THE OLD woman hobbled painfully, and the starving man stood hidden and analyzed her. An old woman alone seemed impossible, yet her men might only be away. By the huge linen bonnet and general untidiness he judged her to be Dutch; by the slovenly buildings her men, decidedly, were Dutch. Dutch farmers—low class Boers. But he must try it, even should it hide a nest of police.

The sun was sinking and shadows darkened the wide verandah. A boy came round a corner, handed a glass over the rail and disappeared. Where the glass went, Bryant made out a gaunt old man. The man's head came about, and there was a long gray beard.

"*Oom Piet?*" Bryant's cracked lips started to mumble to himself. "Suspicious even of a certified angel."

Desperate, he left his shelter and intentionally scuffled noisily as he walked. The old woman turned as though she creaked.

"*Morrow, mijnheer,*" she greeted.

Gaining courage, Bryant approached her. "*Guid morrow, Tante,*" he said. His chin was streaked with blood.

Aged eyes in a yellow, shriveled skin looked him over and gaged him.

"The Baas is tired? The Baas is sick?"

"Hungry," the man gasped. "Very hungry."

"The other Baas?" she queried. "The Bass' horse? The Bass' hat?"

"Horse bolted. A lion got him. Lost my hat in the mixup. I've had to walk for two days."

"Ma-a-arta!" she wondered, then slowly swerved. "Ingubu," she called to a native. "Coffee *maak.* Will the mijnheer come up on to the *stoep*?"

The old man did not move as Bryant stepped up, and the woman indicated a horn and bokskin seat close to him. Bryant accepted and the old man did not so much as nod. The woman went on and hobbled and sought support of the wall and doorpost as she went. By her words she soon must have reached a kitchen. The graybeard searched the

other with blatant scorn and contempt.

"Where are you bound for?" he at last asked flatly.

The hunted man was quite unready.

"Prospecting," he said vaguely.

"Oh. Prospecting? On a horse—and you haven't got one? You're starving, and you should have passed Theron's farm ten miles back, if you were on the road. You've been walking through the bush—at night. You're torn—you've been running. Prospectors don't run through the bush at night."

Again the other was unready, and too infinitely weary and weak to take him up. A pannikin stood on the veranda rail, and a canvas water bag hung near it. Greedily he poured tin after tin of cold water and feasted on it, then sank into his chair once more. The Dutchman watched every move.

"I lost my horse fifty miles away," Bryant explained. "I've wandered about for two days since."

The old Boer snorted.

"A prospector? And you didn't know your district well enough to know where the water holes were?"

"It's all new country to me," Bryant parried. "I've never been over it before."

"And you prospected on a horse?"

Padding feet came through the doorway, and behind them crept the old woman. A Kaffir held a tray with a bottle and two glasses.

"The Baas is tired," the woman soothed. "*A bitje buchu* brandy before he eats. The *buchu* is good. Oom Jan made it.

"Oom Jan, don't worry the Baas. Wait till he has eaten and slept."

The old man glowered at the admonition.

"Men don't prospect on horseback," he commented.

Bryant poured and eagerly drank, then slouched deeper into his seat. The woman, holding the iron framework of the seat for support, remained by him. That he understood Dutch she had seen from the first, and that killed suspicion with her.

"Supper won't be long," she said. "Hans, my Hottentot, has to cook for me now. Karl, there—" she raised a thin, withered arm and pointed to a huge Capeboy halfcaste loitering outside a stable—"is a good cook, but he has taken a Kaffir *vrouw* now and is lazy. His black wife works for him.

"I can't work any more, mijnheer, my body and limbs are stiff with rheumatism. And the rains are coming now, I shall have to sit all day or lie in bed."

Though starving and aching for food the man listened attentively to the woman. That any one at all should speak to him as an equal was a comforting thing.

"Why don't you go down country to a city, or go to hospital?" he said. "If they couldn't cure you, they at least could give you ease and look after you."

"I know," the old woman agreed, then looked to the surly graybeard. "Life will not be long for me here, but while I live I feel I can't leave him. And we can't spare the money. I'd like to go to hospital. though."

"Go," the man advised her. "If you love him, and he wants to keep you, go."

For an instant the woman was silent, and the aged eyes looked into the distance. She pulled herself together. Straightening, she called to the Capeboy to fix a bed in a room at the back of the kitchen, then indicated that the food was ready. Though ragged, she served as a lady. With the graybeard sitting in a corner watching intently, the starving man, through tender throat, gorged himself.

The meal was over, Bryant refreshed. Biding his time, the old man again began his bitter questioning. The up-country distrust of a man afoot never would down.

"Where are you really bound for?" the Dutchman demanded.

"Going somewhere where I can buy a horse," Bryant lied; and the old man knew he was lying.

Contrary to a Dutchman's everlasting wish to sell, the graybeard objected.

"You can't buy a horse. You don't

dare go and look for a horse. You're a *schelm*—a *Boer-verneuker*."

The woman caught Bryant by the arm.

"Keep quiet, Oom Jan," she gently chided. "The Baas is tired, and that is no way to talk to a stranger— Come along, Baas. I'll show you your bed. I shall have to go to hospital to try to get cured when I can afford it, I can see," she whispered, as she passed through the doorway. "*Oom* Jan is getting old and peevish, and I must live to take care of him."

From their rear droned a muttered sentence.

"Men don't go prospecting on horseback."

But all the bitterness around him meant nothing. In ten minutes the hunted man was fast asleep. With the guardianship of the wrinkled old woman, thought of danger was a thing that had ceased to exist.

A BELLOW suddenly seemed to rock the room.

"Put your hands up! Put 'em up, quick!"

Shooting to his senses as if wakened by an explosion, Bryant blinked and sat up in bed. The room was lighted, but for an instant he could not see. Then a harsh Dutch voice seemed to clear his head.

"Put your hands up, you thieving dog! Keep 'em up."

Bryant's hands went above his head and he at once took note of his intruders. By the graybeard's side in the doorway stood the huge Capeboy halfcaste; directly behind him, holding a lamp, the Hottentot, in the gloom behind them the shadowy faces of other natives. The old man held a ready shotgun.

"Keep 'em up," he went on. "Karl, go in and take the man's revolver."

"What for? What have I done wrong?" Bryant asked, at length.

The old man did not reply, and the Capeboy moved slowly forward. In his hand was a heavy wooden *knobkerrie*. Grinning, though plainly not pleased with his job, he took one or two cautious steps. Curiosity caused the other Kaffirs to squeeze in, and he was forced closer to the bed.

"Hit him over the head if he tries to resist," the old man ordered.

A shrill voice from outside the door at that second checked all. The Capeboy appeared to shudder.

"Don't you dare touch that man, Karl! Oom Jan, stand back and leave the man alone!"

The old man winced and turned.

"You mind your own business, Tante Katje. Go back to bed. This is a man's affair."

"Yes," the woman said, as she pushed her way through the mob of Kaffirs. "A man's affair, but tonight you're not a man. Would you set natives on a white man?"

"No," the old man said savagely. "But he's not a white man. I've sent a runner to Belingwe to tell them that we have some sort of a criminal, and I'm going to fasten him up and hold him three or four days till the police get here."

"You're not!" the woman shouted, and next instant the frail body had forced itself into the room.

The graybeard went to grip her, but her very weakness made her fall away from him. With her back against a wall she eyed him boldly, then quickly glanced to the wondering Capeboy.

"Call that boy off!" she demanded. "Oom Jan, I told you the Baas looked like our son Barendts, who fell at Paardeberg. Like him or not, we must not harm a stranger."

"He's a thief. He looks like a thief," the graybeard insisted.

The Capeboy gained the side of the bed, and Bryant's thought that he, himself, had been at Paardeberg and may have killed that very son did not get time to fulminate. The boy reached his hand behind the sitting man and fumbled with the holster strap.

"Call him off," the woman repeated.

"I won't."

The Capeboy let out a yell, then jumped and pressed himself into a corner. His eyes were terror stricken. A warning bullet had zipped into the wall close above his head.

"Get out, you dog," the woman instructed.

The revolver she had suddenly produced was now aimed at Oom Jan's feet, but Oom Jan remembered '81, when she had fought at her brothers' side at Potchefstroom. The gun, like a streak, might flash up. Oom Jan stood bewildered.

"Get out, you rats! All of you!" the woman went on. "Oom Jan, take your carrion away. I want to live for your sake, but if you force me you won't live at all."

"He goes prospecting on horseback," the old man persisted, in self-defense.

The revolver now aimed directly at the Capeboy, and followed him as he moved. A shaking hand pointed to the doorway.

"Go to your black *vrouw*, pig!" the woman ordered. "You other swine go to your huts. Oom Jan, go to your cradle.

"Mijnheer," she continued, and crept over to Bryant. "Get up and go quickly. Oom Jan is like a child sometimes, and a child with a gun is dangerous. Forgive him, mijnheer. Hurry! I'll find you a hat that my good son Barendts used to wear. You're just the same as my son.

"Leave us at once, mijnheer, with the blessing of an old woman. The blessing of the mother of Barendts."

Bryant took her bony hand, then hastily scrambled out of bed and to his feet. Once more his brain was rioting out of control.

A blessing? The mother of Barendts? The diamonds? Eternal trouble? Now he was off again. Curse the damned diamonds! At the finish they would catch him with them.

On a rough table was a piece of torn dirty wrapping paper, and he took it and drew out the belt with the diamonds. The sudden impulse was too strong. The pouch slid off and he wrapped it up. As the woman came in he handed the packet to her.

"Go to the hospital, mother, and get well," he said. "When you get well take that package to Belingwe, and they'll pay much more than your expenses. Any man down there will tell you who to see. Tie it up without opening it, and from tonight sew the packet in your dress. I'm glad to have even one friend."

Smiling, Tante Katje took the packet.

"The mijnheer is my son Barendts come back to life," she said.

THE FARM was two days back; for two nights, much relieved, Bryant had been moving on, and during daytime hiding. At sundown the previous evening he had noted mining camps in the distance, and again this morning occasional lonely camps dotted the veldt. Though knowing but vaguely where he was, the coach road must be somewhere near, and with the camps around he might pass off as a miner. He had not crossed the road at all, that was certain. Sanctuary now only could be gained by making a wide, many hundred mile detour and getting into Portuguese East Africa; and he would need food a hundred times before that. Hunger, again, long since had been hammering loudly.

Taking as good a chance as any other, he curved off toward the north and, in broad daylight, wandered along. Twice during the morning he passed mining outfits at a distance, but avoided those and kept going. At midday, far in front of him, stood a mule shed and, twisting from it, was a sweep of the rough coach road. May as well try it. Food had to be found.

Bryant reached the road and followed it to the mule shed, but only a native helper was there. The native eyed him queerly, but did not make any comment. The next store and outspan, Balla Balla, he said was two hours on—somewhere around a dozen coach miles. Though hating to demean himself the man bartered for some of the native's meal.

Courage revived, Bryant moved off. Once in the afternoon the sound of approaching hoofbeats struck his ear, but he hid till the rider was past. Toward sunset he stood on the banks of the Umsingwane, and knew that the store he was approaching was but a quarter of a mile farther on.

With assumed boldness he entered the store, and the storekeeper, Martin, greeted him warmly. A traveler, wanted by the police or not, always was a break in the monotony. Drinks crossed the counter twice before either came down to facts.

"Going far?" Martin presently asked.

"No," Bryant told him. "Just came in from the claims to get a few things and have a talk."

"Your claims over there?" Martin pointed. "I haven't seen you before."

Bryant pointed the directly opposite way. "No. Over there, ten miles out. Only got there a few days ago. Won't be such a damn' fool as to walk to this place again, though. The bush nearly tore me to pieces."

Martin looked at the tattered clothes and, being forestalled, did not wonder at their extraordinary ruin. His mind was running at two angles.

"You didn't hear about that fellow Bryant and the diamonds, then, eh?" he asked. "He's still in the bush somewhere or other. I expect they'll shoot him on sight."

"What for?" Bryant asked.

"Don't you know?"

With gleeful detail the storekeeper rolled out the story, for robberies in Rhodesia were rare.

"And he's a bad 'un. Has a record," he wound up. "I'd like to take a crack at him myself."

Bryant smiled inwardly as he spoke.

"I can't say I'd be any too sweet on him," he said.

The storekeeper produced another drink, and of a sudden went off on another tangent.

"You're a miner, eh? Must be a dynamite man, if you're that. I wonder would you do something for me?"

"Willingly, if I'm able," Bryant agreed, though dynamite was a sore point just then.

The storeman was serious at once.

"Oh, this is nothing very terrible. You noticed the sharp rocks standing up in the drift as you came through the river, didn't you? The Unsingwane's getting impassable. You didn't notice the rocks were drilled, did you?"

"No," the other admitted.

"They are," Martin went on. "I've had my boys drilling them for days past, and Nattrass, a fellow who has some claims a little way off, was going to fire the charges for me. Nattrass went day before yesterday, and the rains and floods are due any minute, and the coach'll have a hell of a job getting past them when they come. Water may come down in a bore five or six feet high. I must get those rocks blasted out."

"Got plenty of dynamite? Got a battery?" Bryant queried.

"Everything. Dynamite, caps, wires, battery—all that you'll need. Stay over night and get it fixed and do it for me, will you?"

Pleased at the thought of just one night with real rest, and well ahead of Oom Jan's police, Bryant was perfectly amenable.

"Certainly I'll do it," he agreed. "At daybreak I'll get to it. There's the smell of rain on the air already. It ought to be here some time in the morning."

"I'm afraid so," Martin said. "I'll lend you all the boys you want, and you can rush it done."

One or two of the holes had become filled, and several needed deepening. All the morning Bryant had a gang working, and not until noon were they all in shape. The wires from each hole were to be connected at the battery, and all fired at one thrust. At last everything was ready and Bryant, thinking Martin might like to witness the explosion, took a quick walk up to the store.

"Want to see the fireworks?" he asked. "It's your own show, you know, for the coach people ought to have done the work themselves."

"I know," Martin said, "but I want my customers to get here alive, and couldn't wait for them. Did you notice the hills?" he went on, and stepped round to the door of the store. "It's been raining in torrents for two hours, not fifteen miles away."

Bryant nodded.

"Yes, I saw it. By about the time the chips get back to earth after the blast the river'll be running bank full. Well, are you coming down?"

Martin blushed like a guilty child.

"No. I'm almost ashamed to admit it, but I really am scared if near any wired up dynamite. Kiddish, but I can't help it."

"All right, then." Bryant put down his glass and made to move. "You'll have to listen to it, anyway."

The rain was racing nearer, and Bryant watched it as he walked down the steep slope to the river. Tearing down out of the hills the water would crash along like a tidal wave. Quickening his pace, he passed the last scrubby trees, and came within sight of the drift. Then he stopped.

In the once dry river bed was the forerunner of the deluge. Busy trickles of dirty water exploring and marking a way. Coming over the brow of the bank on the far side of the river were the heads of mules, close behind them was the roof of a coach.

Bryant shouted to the driver to halt but, before he could stop him, mules and coach were trotting and bumping down the descent. The mules pulled out into the sand, the coach jolted to a level, then the crushing bore was round them!

THE BORE came on like an avenging flood, and in its grip rode trees and stumps and trapped animals. On the crest of the foremost wave was a tumbling, twisting crocodile, washed from a waterhole. Like a sea the torrent rushed by, and in a second from bank to bank was four feet of seething water.

The ten coach mules turned to breast the stream, the Capeboy driver, standing howling at them, fought to keep them going; the Kaffir sitting beside him lashed with a thirty foot whip and joined the raucous howl.

"*Ek! Ek! Ekwa-a-ah! Ekwa-a-ah! Tekwaanu!*"

But the mules just stood, the water nearly up to their shoulders. But for the imprisoning harness they would have broken and swam off with the tide. The coach was jammed in the dynamite charged rocks, and even now was swaying to careen.

Bryant ran to the edge of the stream and shouted to the driver.

"Drive them direct against the current. That'll hold them till you get away. Can't you cut them out of the harness? Can you swim? If you can't I'll help you."

A screeching "No"! shot back.

On the roof of the coach, head in bandages and one arm in a sling, but quite unruffled, was the bushman! That bushman up there was an omen of trouble, and now he would be washed away and drowned!

Bryant opened his mouth to yell at him and give him a final blessing. To speed a good hop-off. His mouth remained open just as it was. A leather flap of a window had been pushed aside, and a head and shoulders protruded. The head now faced his way.

"Better jump for it and take a chance, Klass," he heard Musters call to the driver.

Musters? Musters? There was Musters! Musters with the hated bushman he thought he had killed! His two bitter, crafty enemies together at his mercy, and both of them perfectly helpless!

Bryant uttered the delayed yell, and for a moment stood and gloried in the scene. The coach was shivering, but the offending rocks would hold it at an angle and save it from falling flat on its side. The mules already were giving up the fight, and in another few seconds would lose their footing and string out with the torrent.

Then furious revenge overwhelmed all

the rest. The battery was fifty yards back up the road, and hidden in a dip in the uneven ground. One plunge of the fist and the coach would be blown to atoms! What more devilishly wonderful Providence than this? Murder? Murder of natives? What were a couple of innocent natives when the river would be blamed for all?

The man turned to rush away, then the frightened Musters saw him. That man had forced open the door, and was standing waist deep in the water. In his fear Musters did not see who he was.

"Haven't you a rope there?" he shouted over. "Can't you get a rope and haul us out?"

Bryant completed the turn he was making, and stood and waved a vicious fist.

"Yes," he gleefully bawled. "I can haul you out all right. You bet I can! I've some wires here that'll shift you out a damn' sight quicker than ever you've moved in all your rotten life! Just a minute!"

THE MAN raced for the spot where the battery was hidden—and came within a dozen feet of it. Two jumps and he would touch it with his hand. One frantic plunge and he would hear the merriest song of his life. Glory? Happiness? Worth dying for? The happiest second man ever could spend! He must look back once more! Another moment—then of a sudden, trembling, he stopped and straightened up.

Over the tumult sounded a shrill, weak voice—a voice of supplication.

"Mijnheer! Mijnheer!" it cried.

For an instant the man stood paralyzed, then was tearing back to the stream. Revenge? Revenge for the time had fled. But one thing in the world mattered now. On the step of the coach Musters was standing, one arm locked through the open door, the other supporting a woman. No second look was needed to tell who it was. Heaven and hell were arm in arm. Though the water lashed round her frail frame her courage still was there.

"Mijnheer!" she called again. "You must help me. I'm going to the hospital!"

"You'll need to," Bryant thought to himself, then was busy forming plans.

The water between him and the coach was quite impassable, the stream below the coach deeper than on the drift. Any light freight that might have floated her off he saw had ripped and swirled away. But the thing had to be done.

The coach was now at an angle, wedged against the rocks; the mules, kicking and struggling, in a line trailing down the stream. The coach would hold together for a while in the rising torrent, then would wrench out and wash clear with the rest.

Bryant put hands to mouth and bellowed, then Musters saw who he was.

"Musters," he called, "can't you swim off with her? I'll go farther down stream and swim out and head you off."

Musters' unhappy voice came back.

"I'm a very poor swimmer. I can't even take care of myself."

Then again Bryant's brain was busy.

"Climb up on to the seat, Musters, if you can," he bawled. "I'm going to jump in a hundred yards farther up. As I pass you throw her in over the rocks. I can't get to her past those damn' mules."

Without another thought the man was crashing through the bush. No need to wait to see if she would resist. A quick look ere he made the plunge, and the situation was plain. Capeboy, driver and bushman were huddled on and clinging to the half covered roof of the coach, the inspector standing on the seat with the water up to his knees. A hand gripped the straps of the seat, an arm held the dauntless old woman. Bryant saw her face turned his way, then he jumped.

The man sped down as though carried by a mill-race, and through dirty water which clogged his eyes sensed he was not far from the mules. Fierce strokes had brought him well out into the stream, but luck was his only guide. In a flash he was alongside a chain of floating animals, and passing them like an express.

In a daze Bryant heard a shout and

strove to turn his head. For an instant a woman's body was in sight in the air, then was rushing even with him.

The man passed the head of the mules, the old woman scarcely struggling as she surged to him. Fear or blind faith had made her leave her life to chance without a question. A dozen bold strokes and Bryant was to her, had her, and was fighting for the bank farther down. Twice eddies spun him round and a whirlpool sucked him under, but the desperation of the case increased and held his strength. An unresisting passenger was helpful.

BRYANT pulled to shore where the river bent two hundred yards below, and staggered up the bank. His one care, his one friend in the world, was out of danger. The woman still was conscious, and a cold, trusting hand gripped his arm. The dripping, shivering bit of humanity looked into his eyes.

"It's all right, Tante," he soothed her. "I'll have you up at the store in five minutes. There's nothing to fear now."

"The white Baas, mijnheer," she said. "The policeman. He was kind to me, too."

"Musters?" Bryant's mind pounded at him bluntly. "Musters?"

Bryant put her down in the bush, and ten thoughts flashed into his brain one on top of the other. The woman who had said he was like Barendts? The woman who had fought for him? Musters, and ten years if he rescued him? Should he let Tante Katje go to the end of her short days knowing he was not the gentleman she had said he was? Would the coach and the man hold out?

"Wait, Tante Katje," he said. "Wait."

The hunted man crossed the rutted coach road at a run, and shouted as he passed. Musters, the Capeboy and the driver and unruffled bushman were hanging to the upper edge of the sloping roof. The river now roared louder, the mules had ceased to kick.

"Musters!" Bryant yelled. "I'm going up stream the same as with the woman. When I pass you drop off and trust to me."

Then again he went.

A frightened, cowed man slid as a suicide from the coach as the determined man passed by. But he struggled. The dead mules swished and rippled as a wave swept piece of seaweed, and no longer were a menace. In the deeper water swimming was easier, but a strangle hold was hard. As Bryant landed Musters and spit the water from his lungs he said:

"Musters, next time you're drowning throw your guns off. You'll be lighter."

Bryant came back to the old woman, and saw that in her cold wetness she still was unconquered. Her voice came much too low, and the tired man could not catch it. But he understood.

Again he went in, and still again, fighting and weakening, but fighting, fighting! As he pulled the driver's helper up the bank and laid him down the already rescued Capeboy whined at the past terror still so visible.

Bryant walked more slowly and once more came opposite the woman. Now she was lying inert, but her eyes did not seem to close. In his fancy Bryant saw a faint smile. Musters was on one knee beside her.

"Pick her up, Musters," Bryant said. "She can't wait for me. Carry her to the store and take care of her. I'm going to finish my job, then I'll follow."

Musters looked at him strangely and shrugged his shoulders.

"Think you can save him? Think there's time?"

"There may be if I hurry."

Wearily the man turned and looked at the top of the coach. The bushman was half covered, but hanging by one hand to a strap. The bushman did not howl. Should he get to him? Could he get to him? Why?

Again he spoke to Musters: the warning seemed unnecessary.

"Be careful with her, Musters," he said.

Musters took the woman in his arms and started through the bush. Fear and excitement had him, and his steps were as unsteady as a baby's. The burden in his

arms interfered with his immediate vision and he stumbled as he went. But he was alive! Alive!

Musters came to the edge of the road, turned up it, came to more uneven ground. His feet did not seem to belong to him and several times he nearly fell. More carefully he picked his steps. Then once he stepped high to make sure, brought a foot down with a crash, and some mechanical thing moved under him. That moment he knew it all.

The hunted man on the way to the stream halted as if shot. Stood transfixed. In the surging water before him was a roar and a boiling rise, while rocks and spray flew into the air. The river appeared to erupt. The coach lifted clear of the stream, and dragged half of the line of mules up with it. A jumbled geyser was there. The waters lashed to surge backwards.

The coach turned over, came down wheels uppermost. Splashed a farewell. With the bushman beneath it and mules stringing like the tail of a kite it wriggled as a great snake toward the sea.

THE TWO soaking men stood face to face in front of the store bar. Martin was in a hut at the back attending to the staunch old woman. Bryant looked earnestly into Muster's face.

"I'm sorry for what I've done, Musters," he admitted. "I've been a silly, revengeful fool. I'm ready for all that's coming to me, and I deserve it."

Musters peered at him with a most curious expression.

"S-s-sh, man. Be careful. Your name isn't Bryant any more."

"But I am sorry," the other insisted. "I've only been causing myself trouble. Let's get done with it and go back."

"All right," Musters agreed. "But where are the diamonds? What did you do with them?"

In his miserable, tired state Bryant yet had to laugh.

"Gave 'em to a messenger to return, Musters. You've been sitting beside 'em in the coach all the time, and just now you carried 'em in your arms."

"How?" the other asked, dumfounded.

"I gave them to Tante Katje so that the reward would pay her hospital expenses. I can trust her.

"Musters." he sank to deadly seriousness. "You see she gets that reward."

Musters face was blank. The thing was all too stupid.

"And I was taking that useless bushman on the coach and going on to M'Kekwes to send police and Kaffirs to beat the bush back toward you and cut you off?" he queried.

"I don't know what you were doing," the other asserted, "but I'm finished with diamonds. She's got 'em."

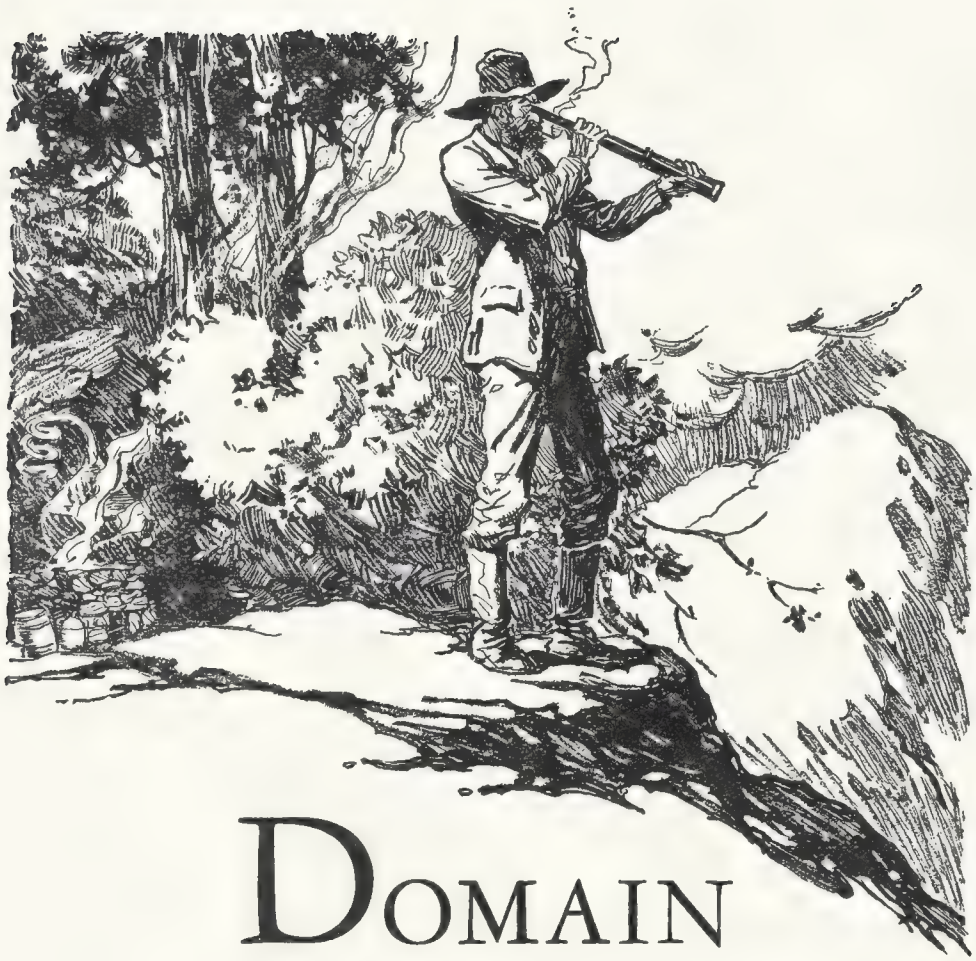
Musters put a hand in a sopping pocket and brought out a dripping pocketbook. From the book he took a roll of notes which stuck and were as one. With difficulty he pulled the notes apart and counted them out.

"I know you've finished with diamonds," he said. "You're somebody else from today. Here's half of all I have with me. No one ever will know what we've done. Throw that idiotic bust gun away and take one of mine. Martin seems to have several horses. Buy one of them."

"To ride back with you?" Bryant queried.

Musters shot a quick glance through the door leading into the back. The coast was clear.

"No," he dissented. "There's a wagon bridge over the Crocodile due south and to the west of Macloutsie, and it isn't guarded. There are no police between this place and there. Ride like blazes and get into the Transvaal and safety. Start afresh, boy. You played a gentleman's game."



DOMAIN

By FISWOODE TARLETON

THE OLD spyglass shows Talt Allen the two wild hogs coming out the high beechwoods atop the gap, the only movement in the wild and primitive landscape. He turns the glass on the gap itself, the only inlet to his domain, the domain of the Allens. Grim, forbidding land. Pretty soon he looks around at his two boys; watches them feed the fire under the still. Corn going into liquor and Talt on the lookout for folks coming through the gap, his sharp memory and quick hunter's eyes ready to size up strangers, or hillmen belonging to his own Meddlesome Creek country.

Everybody coming through the gap stands out plain to Talt Allen. Hillmen astride mules loaded with sacks of grain, grain-corn bound for a secluded mountain still. Sometimes a dry-land sled drawn by two mules and loaded with fire-coal from a high, mountain mine. Hillmen afoot, armed with rifle-guns, out to hunt squirrels. Folks returning from Milk Sick Cove, or Pennyroyal settlement farther down on Meddlesome. Hill boys trailed by lean hounds with tight bellies. Wandering cows and steers, and sows with their young.

And as figures appear Talt Allen says to himself more than to his boys:

"Hit's Matt Meadows fotchin' shoats. Mose Morgan air right smart steppin'.

The Author of "Bloody Ground" gives us an Elemental Adventure in Civilization among the Kentucky Hillbillies

Ked O'Gowd's
boy air fotchin' cat'ridges
from Pennyrile, I reckon."

When their pappy speaks, the boys, Anse and Abe, pay no attention but continue feeding the fire mechanically. Chips off the old block, new editions of their pappy, they sometimes rise to stretch, move their Winchester guns a little nearer them and then go on with their duties. Anse, the older of the boys, the image of his pappy, sometimes rises and steps over to his pappy for a peep through the old glass, then sits down in silence.

Like his pappy, Anse knows every isolated soul in his district. Knows everybody who comes through the gap by sight. Knows peace officers from Pennyroyal settlement, from Leeston, the county seat; even from Anathoth, the railroad town, far beyond across a score of mountains.

The sticks under the still continue to crackle while Talt Allen rests his spyglass in the fork of a sapling and watches. Old spyglass handed down by his great grandpappy, old seaglass that landed at Jamestown with his forebears shows him the expression on every face pushing ahead through the gap; shows him almost the hairs on every mule and wild hog.

The gap, the narrow defile dividing two great ridges, is the only gateway to the Allens, the only approach that needs watching. On all other sides precipices, laurel hells laced with the tearing, merciless greenbrier. Perpendicular fields sowed in corn and beans. Cold spring water flowing endlessly from the rocks ten paces from his cabin door. Food and drink at his door. Power strengthened by five generations since Dan Boone's time. Independence. A monarchy in which Talt Allen rules. Master of his soul and the souls of his woman and boys and girl. The wildest hinterland in Appalachia. A fortress built by nature. Talt Allen's domain.

When Talt looks through the glass again he sees a wild boar-hog with white shining tushes coming through the gap. Thin like a deer. Braver than a bear. More vicious and dangerous than a catamount. A menace to hillmen. Menace even to armed hillmen because they do not dare kill the wild boar of the Allens. Men and boys climb trees and pull themselves up the ledges when they meet this boar in the gap. Some hang their legs out of reach for hours, waiting for the boar to wander off.

Talt Allen with the eyesight of an eagle, the hearing of a dog, the instinct of a wild beast knows that his woman is approaching now from the cabin beyond

the still. Knows she's coming down trail, not with the ax this time to get firewood, not with the hoe to work the corn, not with the buckets to get water, but empty handed. Coming special. Talt keeps his eyes to the old spyglass. Keeps her waiting as she approaches and stands silently back of him, waiting his pleasure to speak. She's observing a ritual. A ritual enforced by Talt's pappy and grandpappy, and great grandpappy before him. Custom of kings. So that Talt's authority shall be maintained and respect held strong he continues to look through the glass for some minutes. His eyes sweep the high ridges and the gap over and over again while his woman waits.

He is conscious of his two boys looking at him, waiting for him to speak to their maw. When he lowers his glass he puts it under his arm. He breaks off a piece of twist tobacco and fills his mountain clay pipe.

"Wal," he says, looking around at his woman.

She folds her hands across her stomach and looks at her boys as she answers her man.

"Barbara air gone."

Talt loads his pipe and shows no change of expression. The boys glance at him, wait again for him to speak. Like their maw they wait on him.

WHEN he gets his pipe going Talt takes another look through the spyglass. Watches a hillman coming through the gap. Sees the hillman turn sharply and go back as he sights the wild boar.

"How Barbara git away?" Talt asks at last with a brittle, hard stare at his woman.

She tells him that their girl, Barbara, got away by stuffing her cot-bed full of mule harness and quilts. Built up the bed to look as if she were sleeping in it. Never went to bed though, but sneaked away under cover of night while her pappy and brothers and maw slept. Talt's woman tells him these things in the slow unemotional voice of the hills. And she tells him almost in a whisper that their gal took along her "tafferter" dress and her shoes and stockings.

Talt, his woman, and his two boys glance at one another. The woman stands immovable. The boys, seeking escape from their pappy's hard eyes, begin to feed the fire again. Talt rolls the old spyglass over and over in his hand. Casualness and unconcern work into their faces, but, way down in them all, something stirs and pricks and tosses, and struggles to rise. Struggles vainly to disturb their poise, their dignity, their pride.

A strange heat is mounting to the head of Talt Allen as he sees that what they all have feared has really come to pass. His girl Barbara, Barbara Allen, named after the old song, proud girl of his name, running away to hitch with a foreigner, an outsider, a man out of her district. All his objections to Bud Falloway stand out clear in Talt's mind, seem to pass before him in dreadful review. The Falloway habit of trying to run the whole Cumberland country. Their growing power. Their refusal to sell their grain to those who make liquor. Their heavy endowments to settlement schools in the mountains and their bringing in of lowland—foreign—teachers.

On top all these things, thickening like scum, is the galling thought that his gal is lost to him. Folks are going to say in the settlement and from the backs of their mules as they pass in the creek-bed road that his, Talt Allen's power, is weakening; that a Falloway took his gal from under his nose. Knowing the steep trails, the dangerous cliffs and ledges, she stole away at night; left him for an outsider, an enemy to all hill traditions.

Talt sees a weakening of his power, his domain. Sees absolute disgrace if he allows the girl to stay with the Falloways in their foreign land—the Falloways who are trying to build a road through the hinterland, trying to enforce taxes on hillmen who want only to be left alone. Falloways who bring in the railroads, who go to the legislature and try to make lowland laws for the highlands.

As he glances at his boys he seems to be trying to read what is in their minds. He knows that if he lets this disgrace of his gal running away pass without notice it may not be long before his boys feel the weakening of their pappy's power. Little by little they will slip away.

With the hard brown eyes of the Cumberlander he seems to pinion his boys. They twitch and lower their eyes to feed the fire.

"Anse," he says sharply, "you-un kin fotch back Barbara."

The older boy of Talt Allen rises slowly, eyed by his brother and his maw. He picks up his Winchester rifle-gun and saunters away amid silence. He enters the mouth of the trail that meanders through the tight laurel and rhododendron, then dips steep and rough to the foot of the ridge and the approach to the gap. Before he disappears from view he turns and has a glimpse of his pappy looking through the old spyglass, his maw brushing her hair from her eyes, his brother feeding the fire.

In the long, regular, springy stride of the hillman he moves on and loses sight of his people. Stopping only once to whip a copperhead snake to death with a branch from a sapling when it defies him on the trail, he reaches the thick timber, close growing beeches that make a curtain to hide his pappy's domain. Tight beech forest that stands like an outer fortification. As he walks, his eyes and ears are alert, sensitive to every movement, knowing instantly what every sound, every movement means. Wild hogs grunt away. Some stop cracking nuts and rooting to stare at him. Some draw their bodies back. Some follow him for a few steps. He goes around a sow with young ones rather than make her charge. He would have to shoot her if she charged, or have to climb a tree.

Responsibility is upon his shoulders. He is on a hunt for bigger things than hogs. He is empowered with orders from his pappy. Given a command by his pappy, who is king of Meddlesome. He is going to bring back his pappy's gal; going into enemy country.

Leaving the beech woods, he enters the sycamores, another concealment. Then he comes into the open, the exposed approach to the gap from the Allen side. He maintains his pace until he reaches the gap itself, then slows up and half turns to look back and up. He waves a hand. Gesture that he is gone. He knows exactly where his pappy stands. Were his Pappy an enemy, were his brother an enemy, he could train his rifle-gun right on their heads, so well does he know the position of his pappy's lookout, high above—above the laurel and the beeches.

When Anse passes through the gap without conflict with his pappy's mad boar-hog, he turns to the left, descends the steep trail that leads down, way down to the narrow valley, to the slow moving waters of Meddlesome. He begins to hear the faint hum of the waters pretty soon, then suddenly above it, the splashing of a mule in the creek-bed road. When he leaves the mouth of the trail and stands on the bank of Meddlesome he looks up and down. Then he sets out, southward, in long strides over the gravel banks, gravel piled down into the ravine by mountain freshets. Rounding a bend, he catches sight of a hillman ahead of him, hillman astride a mule. Mule hanging his head in strange brute dreams. The hillman is bound for Pennyroyal settlement, keeping his eyes on the tops of the sycamores as he rides. On the lookout for squirrels, gathering his supper as he rides to the settlement and back.

ANSE lengthens his stride still more as he recognizes Hard Meadowes. Hard, who is never without a rifle-gun, who is always vanquished, though, by Anse at the matches, who is always practising rifle-gun fire along Meddlesome. It has been a long time since Anse attended these Sunday morning shootings. It has been a long time since the Milk Sick Cove men have seen him. He has had to lie low for a long time. Drives by the prohibi-

tion and revenue men kept the Allens bottled up for months, bottled up until he, Anse, lost the habit of the matches.

And now as he takes up the gap between him and the hillman he feels the need of making another show of his prowess, fresh evidence that the Allen genius for sure shooting has not lessened during the months. In this land where a man-child is born to the rifle-gun, where men decapitate turkeys at a hundred yards, the Meddlesome Creek Allens have always carried off honors. But now—now his blood sister, his pappy's gal, has left her people, gone at a foreigner's bidding. There is a weakening in the power of the Allens which Anse feels. He feels something has to be mended. Something has got to be strengthened. He sees the first step as he approaches the hillman on the mule.

As Anse forges ahead of Hard Meadowes he keeps his eyes on the tree limbs. Pretty soon the corner of his eye is whipped by a gray streak in a sycamore. The throw of the rifle-gun to his shoulder, the report, the thud as the squirrel strikes the ground, are too usual for a hillman to notice. But Anse sees the white mark on the limb where his shot displaced the bark, sees slivers of the bark flutter to earth. He knows without looking back that Hard Meadowes sees and reads. He hears the footfalls of the mule stop and knows that Hard Meadowes is looking at the tree branch in wonderment. Anse knows that to bark a squirrel so quickly, so neatly, hillmen have worked a lifetime. Killing a squirrel without making a bruise on its body. Shocking it to death.

Pretty soon Anse passes hill children who are hunting for crawfish under the rocks in Meddlesome. The boys stare at the big bore Winchester; the girls glance up while they feel under the rocks. Anse's eyes fill for an instant with boys and girls moving their heads together. He knows what they are whispering. They are whispering that he is Talt Allen's boy. Talt Allen's boy! The thought seems to impose a freshening courage. In the hills if a boy's pappy is respected, powerful, feared, his way is made easier. Men bid for his friendship, unless they nurse a deep grudge, unless their own people are equally powerful.

The low laurel along the banks of Meddlesome gives way to the spreading cucumber trees, then to the tulip and dogwood. As Anse turns another bend and is forced to walk in the water, follow the path of the mules, he sees beyond the forms of four hillmen lying on the opposite bank, under a clump of sycamores. As he approaches he hears the voice of one of them speaking loudly, boasting. In a land where men are slow to boast or brag, where they are cautious about voicing their prowess, the voice of the one who brags under the sycamores seems like a discord, a false note in the hills. The talk nettles Anse before he can make it all out, before he has a good look at the owner.

Walking slowly so he can hear, and leaving the water for the bank, he passes the four with a nod.

"I shore flung-fotched 'at baby ter earth, I'm a-tellin' yer. When hit comes ter throw-fightin' I haint a-takin' off my hat ter ary man. I heerd 'at Pennyrile billy jes' cain't move his ol' bone-jints since this-un bang-throwed him. Huh. Ef yer want ter see wrestle-fightin' yer oughter jine Navy. 'At's whar yer kin see wrestlin'. On fightin' ship. Man cain't find peace lessen he fight-throw ever' man on ship. Geeamighty!"

Anse throws a quick glance at the spouting hillman. Recognizes him. Ked, one of the Ferris boys from across the big mountain, from Duckhead Creek district. First cousin to the three Taney boys who lie with him under the sycamores. Ked Ferris, who has been coming over to Pennyroyal settlement on Saturday evenings and throwing men under the porticos; Ked, who breaks up Baptist prayer meetings on Wednesday evenings.

Ked Ferris rises to his elbows and looks Anse over.

"Don' yer git scairt," he says to Anse. "Hain't a-goin' hurt yuh none."

The Taney boys poke Ked with their boot toes, try to silence him, as Anse hesi-

tates some feet away. Ked's kin show concern in their eyes and squirm. But from the lips of the hillman who joined the Navy comes more words. Corn liquor is talking in him, flaying the Pennyroyal and the Milk Sick cove men. Big talk about winning bouts in the Navy, and over at the coal mines on the railroad. Ked brags about never being "throwed". and about tossing niggers into the sea right and left as quick as he saw them on the docks at Suez, which is a place the Meddlesome Creek men never even heard of.

Anse takes a step onward. He is on a mission for his pappy and can not afford to waste time here. But coming over him suddenly is the disturbing thought that if he goes on, if he seems to be walking away from trouble, this Ked Ferris will spread around the report that he, the boy of Talt Allen, was afraid of him. His pappy's power and prestige needs to be bolstered up, not weakened. So Anse stops and looks around again at the Duckhead ex-sailor.

"By doggies!" says Ked. "Ef he jes' haint a-courtin' trouble!"

LEANING his rifle-gun up against a sycamore Anse waits for the Duckhead man to rise and come for him. He watches the ex-sailor go through the antics and motions of professional wrestlers; Anse's arms, though hanging by his sides, are ready as Ked crouches and stoops and makes feints for his body. When Ked suddenly gets a hold on Anse's waist and his hands slide under his armpits for a neck breaking hold, Anse comes to life. His knee strikes Ked's belly like a ram, doubles up the Duckhead man, jackknife's his body. The power in a leg that takes an Allen over a high mountain as easily as on the level creek-bed road would double up Samson himself, let alone a man whose wind is sapped by corn liquor. Ked Ferris, a showman; Ked, who's imported tactics to use against hillmen born to rough and tumble fighting and wrestling, yells foul. Yells between intakes of breaths that Anse would be mobbed in the Navy. But the cry of foul in the hills is the cry of defeat and fear. In a land where men give and take as things come, where all may gouge and kick, as well as hit, the excuse of Ked Ferris makes Anse smile.

"Huh," says Anse, picking up his rifle-gun. He walks off, continues on down Meddlesome.

No trace of emotion, no thrill in his senses, no inclination to strut or show effects of victory attend him as he travels in his long strides along the creek-bed road. A severely simple satisfaction, a cold passionless realization that he has kept up the prestige of the Allens, and is equal to emergencies, possesses him for a minute, then is suddenly checked. He downs the pride he is feeling. Way down in the highland soul there is a spot where the highlander shuts out, locks up, his pride. A spot way down in him where affection, pride, even hate have become inarticulate through repression.

Anse moves on bravely, determinedly to a goal, conscious of power, conscious of his pappy's domain back there resting on a trust, a trust that he, Anse, the boy of Talt, will bring back the runaway, the only girl of the Meddlesome Creek Allens.

Oddly, as he leaves the creek-bed and cuts over a low hill to save a quarter-mile, he thinks of the death of his grandpappy. It is brought to his mind by a certain lay of the land, a certain spot cleared around some laurel, just like the place where his grandpappy was plugged by a revenue man, while he, Anse, a child, was forced to look on. And thinking about his grandpappy brings Anse's mind to a book, one of the three books, mildewed and torn and yellow, that lie on the shelf in his pappy's house.

One of his grandpappy's three books that were brought over by his papy or grandpappy, brought over from some far country across the sea, brought over by Anse's ancestors who had to leave the far country long ago. A king turned the screws tight on Anse's people way

back in time, tax burdened them to death almost, and so they had to leave.

Anse recalls carrying the book to the school teacher at Milk Sick Cove one time. The school teacher, a highlander with great learning said:

"Way back in time, way back when rifle-guns were unknown and families had to set up walls around their homes, way back when might was right and power was virtue, and chiefs had to fight all their lives to keep their domains secure, men carried off women that took their fancy. Chiefs captured the women of other domains and brought them to their feudal castles. This book," the school teacher went on, "is about a girl that was carried off. Her people tried to get her but they couldn't. In those days virtue was power, you see."

Over the low hill, and meeting Meddlesome again as he goes down the other side, Anse, the boy of Talt Allen, experiences, thus, a lapse of mind. Through the thick, laurel covered trail that follows the creek bed, he moves mechanically. The baying of a hound brings his mind back to the present, detaches it from the hazy land across the sea, where men ride hazily with women slung across their saddles.

It has been a long time since Anse was in Pennyroyal settlement. His settlement is Milk Sick Cove. His pappy's stronghold is nearer the cove than Pennyroyal. Seems to him now that the country grows meaner and less attractive as the valley widens and the hills draw back, ugly and bare with their timber cut, and bristling with stumps. He begins to meet hillmen riding mules. After a while he passes the mail wagon pulled over the rough creek-bed road by two mules. The mail boy and two passengers wave at him, then suddenly clutch the sides of the seats as the wagon strikes a boulder and almost upsets.

Anse glances up at the sun. Sees that the morning is going fast and again increases his stride. Far beyond Pennyroyal is the home, the land of the Falloways. Anse's mind is puzzled over his sister getting away, but is still more puzzled over how she happened to make up with a Falloway.

This is the mystery that fills his mind. When there are good men in her own district, when her own cousin, the school teacher, Noah Allen, wanted to hitch with Anse's sister, why did she make up with a foreigner? His sister begins to stand out more and more as a traitor, a traitor to the Allen clan. And Anse's resolve to bring her back becomes stronger as he leaves the creek-bed and climbs the bank and finds himself at the end of Pennyroyal's main street.

Slowing down, Anse's eyes sweep the town as he walks down the mud road to the business stores. Before he reaches the porticos his eyes have placed every hillman and hill woman who sits under the porticos or leans against the business store walls and hitching racks.

Anse draws eyes as he steps under the first portico and leans against its post.

He sees that his presence makes whisperings. Men shift and watch him from under their wide brimmed hats. Some speak. Some nod. One waves feebly from across the road.

Anse watches him saunter slowly up to the harness shop, then cross the road, whistling to himself. Anse feels rather than sees the young hillman approaching him. Without looking Anse knows the hillman is now leaning against a post near him and whittling nonchalantly. He is not surprised when the hillman steps over to him and says in a whisper—

"Hain't yer Talt Allen's boy?"

Anse turns his face for a look at him. Sees he is one of the Farrel boys from Duckhead Creek.

"Reckon I air," says Anse, and looks across the mud road again. He waits for the man to go on.

"Wal," says the Duckhead man at length, "this mawnin' I war fotchin' shoat uptrail an' seed yore pappy's girl mulin' hit with Bud Falloway through Pennyrile. Seed 'em from yander hilltop. Ol' fire-ball jes' a-comin' up when this-un seed 'em."

WHILE the informer whittles and glances at Anse now and then out of the corner of his eye, while men whisper under the porticos and business store men come to their doorways to watch, Talt Allen's boy senses that every man in town, every woman, every boy under the porticos knows what is up. Bud Falloway, from the land of the Falloways across mountains, has defied Anse's pappy; his own gal has defied him. The news has already spread in the settlement and along Meddlesome. Folks have something to wonder and think about. Anse knows that some are privately gloating over his pappy being tricked and beaten. Satisfaction in the souls of some. Anse sees more than one young hillman who has tried to make up with Barbara, his sister; more than one who has felt her disdain and her pappy's.

The sting of a hurt pride grows sharper to Anse. That his sister would hitch with a man outside her district, a man from another world, a man who is trying to coax in the railroad, a man who said at a Fourth of July speech-making that the day is coming soon when automobiles will line the street in Pennyroyal and every other hill town, instead of mules and dry-land sleds. All these things mean just one thing: The Falloways have once more come out on top. And being a hillman, Anse knows that the boy of the Duckhead Farrels who just said that he saw Barbara Allen and Bud Falloway, was carrying out a subtle revenge for those, who, like himself, were ignored by Talt's gal. This Farrel boy was letting Anse know that folks knew the disgrace his, Anse's people, had fallen into. It was the same as if the Farrel boy had said that the folks under the porticos knew that the Allen structure was beginning to weaken. Those who are staring and whispering under the porticos, and looking up from under wide brimmed hats, are conscious of a crumbling of power.

Anse knows that a little gap in the hills will gradually wear down to a big one. In his mind there seems to be the need of repairing something, something he vaguely sees as a gap in his pappy's domain. It is a mystical thing, this break, this weakening. Anse sweeps the town with his eyes as if searching for a means to repair a break, a way to strengthen a name. It is as if he is looking for a tool to repair a sudden break in his pappy's cabin or in the corn crib. Oddly, his mind seems to think only of a tool to repair the Allen name.

It has been a long time since he was in Pennyroyal settlement. Months have passed since he came down Meddlesome this far with his mule to buy a new saddle. Always, whenever he comes to Pennyroyal, there seems to be a duty to fulfill that touches his pappy's domain. There is always the need of leaving this settlement with the show that the Allens are still powerful, still to be feared. He thinks of the last time when he settled a dispute with Moses Valentine, another of the Duckhead Creek boys; settled something in short order, almost on the spot where he now stands. The same faces looked out from under the porticos on that morning. Even Luke Foraker, the deputy sheriff, stood in the same spot where Anse sees him now. Anse sees that the law, in the person of Luke, is looking at him.

Apathy that hangs in the air and stands out on the dark faces under the porticos gives way slowly. There is something in the sudden shifting of bodies and the quick glances down the mud road that gets Anse's attention. He sees Luke Foraker, the deputy sheriff, move off; move off in slow strides as he looks at papers taken from his hip pocket. Then down the road, just below the narrow bridge over Meddlesome, he sees a hillman astride a mule approaching town. Jabe Morgan, the Duckhead champion of Saturday evening fist fights, comes up the road and slides off his mule in front of the bank with a significance that misses few, a significance that is born to Anse quick. Quick because the sight of the newcomer opens an old sore. With the never failing memory for details of a wrong,

peculiar to the hill mind, Anse thinks of a year old grievance. It begins to rankle in his blood.

Just about a year ago in Pennyroyal settlement when Jabe Morgan, in view of the same men and sons of men who sit under the porticos, laughed at Anse. Laughed and made a gesture which Anse did not see at the time. It was a long time after it happened when Anse finally learned about it—about the gesture. One day when he was toting yellow corn and met Carr O'Gowd on the creek-bed road, he learned about the gesture.

"Effen yer hain't a-goin' tell, hits me a-tellin' yer," Carr had said, "'at Jabe Morgan fotched his thumb to his nose at you-un. This-un seed him."

A year ago since Jabe had thus saluted Anse behind his back. The two are meeting by chance the first time in a year. The incident has traveled far in a year. The slur and the insult to the older boy of Talt Allen is remembered by them all under the porticos. With a sure instinct for trouble even when signs have not actually developed, men become more tense and watchful. They look at Jabe Morgan, who is looking in the bank window, then they look at Anse, who is leaning against a post.

Anse watches the Duckhead fighter, sees him turn around at last. Observes that Jabe Morgan throws him a glance then looks beyond. No surprise, no recognition, no signs on his face that he has seen the boy of Talt Allen. Yet Anse knows that behind the mask of apathy and unconcern the thoughts of Jabe are taken up with him. Behind that sphinx-like face a hill mind is busy with strategy with plans, with schemes for meeting the approaching emergency. The eyes of Jabe Morgan rest on the end of the road, where it joins Meddlesome, so he can think and plot.

As the two men—an Allen from Meddlesome and a Morgan from Duckhead—stand immovable on opposite sides of the street, and appear unconscious of each others presence, the score of hillmen and town men under the porticos increase to two score. Swelled by the keepers of the business stores and the loafers inside the restaurant, the crowd knits together into groups.

Anse knows the first move is his. His is the grievance. And he knows that the Allen name is on trial. The recovery of his pappy's gal, his own sister, Barbara, is his mission; but there is the pressing need now of first showing Pennyroyal that a man who trifles with an Allen has to pay. He knows when a mountain family loses power, allows the respect of folks to wane, trouble comes piling on top of trouble. One defeat begets another. The punishment of a Duckhead Morgan means more than the avenging of a private wrong. Secretly Anse seizes the chance to offset the moral defeat of his pappy and his family when they lose Barbara Allen to a Falloway. Maybe way down in Anse there is the call of his own blood for a fresh example of his courage and confidence, a test he puts to himself.

HE KNOWS better than to put a chip on his shoulder, even figuratively, and to walk up to Jabe Morgan; and he knows better than to expect Jabe to put a chip on his shoulder. The move, first move is Anse's. But he wants his act, his plan for revenge, to be effective as Jabe's insult a year ago. He watches the hogs wallowing in the mud for two or three minutes. Then he glances up and down the road, and at last glances back of him. He sees a pot-licker bitch hound suckling her puppies as she lies under the porticos, in front of a business store. Her puppies yanking at her teats, while her eyes blink and her mouth snaps at the flies buzzing lazily around her.

While men under the porticos watch and Jabe Morgan leans up against a post in front of the bank building, Anse steps over to the hound mother suckling her puppies. He leans his rifle-gun up against the wall of the building and bending down, picks up one of the puppies. Holds it in his arms and strokes it. Slowly straightening up he looks across the road, di-

rectly at Jabe Morgan. The Duckhead fighter throws him a glance. His glance lasts long enough to see Anse point with his thumb at the potlicker hound and her puppies and grin. The meaning is sharp. Men under the porticos grasp the idea quickly. Pantomime stronger than a curse. A piece of damnation that makes men under the porticos open their mouths and stare at Jabe Morgan, while only the grunting of the hogs in the road and the bellowing of a cow for her calf break the silence of five tense, uncertain minutes.

Maybe because Jabe Morgan is a highlander and knows that a show of temper would seem ungainly after the subtlety of Anse Allen, he casually stretches and gives a hitch to his jean pants. Then he looks up and down the road. His eyes at last seem to search the hilltop and then drop slowly to look at Anse again, who sets the potlicker puppy down on the board walk and again leans against the post.

Jabe Morgan comes, comes in a slow saunter, his hands deep in his pockets. Comes through the mud road with his eyes now on the Meddlesome Creek man, the oldest boy of Talt Allen. He takes his hands from his pockets when he is five feet from Anse and hooks his thumbs in his galluses. Throwing his head back he spits in the Meddlesome Creek man's face.

Anse's form sagging against the post under the porticos makes a quick spring and the impact of the two carries them to the ground, where they lock and gouge and roll in the mud. The wallowing hogs retreat and the cows turn their heads to watch, dull eyed. The men under the porticos and in the doorways of the business stores watch silently. Grim faces, dark under wide brimmed hats, say nothing.

The man from Meddlesome and the man from Duckhead, both big boned and hard muscled, both endowed with genius for gouging, are struggling to free an arm or a leg, trying to unwind a single foot or arm to get an advantage. Rolling over and over, each man awaiting a chance. Somehow Jabe Morgan frees an arm and hits Anse at close range. They loosen holds and rise. There is a minute when fists fly and the crashes of muscle against bone and bone against muscle follow each other quickly. First blood is drawn from the nose of Jabe Morgan and he clinches. Gouging now, mountain gouging carried to its limit. Thumbs against windpipe, knees jabbing each others vitals. Once Jabe's teeth hang like a dog's to Anse's right ear. A fight conducted without rules. Not a Saturday evening fight but a war in which anything is fair. No rules. Highland rough and tumble strategy executed by masters, glorified by mud.

From different districts, from hinterlands separated by many mountains, these two, however, are of the same traditions. Punishment, torture, mean nothing. One of them must go home carrying the stigma of defeat, suffer a collapse of local power, showing the wounds of pride more than the wounds of body. Pride is stronger than pain.

There is a little difference in the strength of the two men. Jabe Morgan seems a bit fresher, a bit quicker to revive after hammerings and thumb pokes. There is a little difference in their ages. Jabe is several years older and has the benefit of more experience. He has been in more conflicts, certain muscles are better developed. He is quicker to see an opening.

Anse, locking again with Jabe to save himself from a series of jabs in the face can not, however, seem to ward off an uppercut on the jaw that sends him to the ground. The world reels before him. The dark faces of men under the porticos draw away strangely, the figure of Jabe Morgan seems terribly big. Anse dimly sees two hillmen rise from their seats on the boardwalk and stretch. A sign that they do not believe he is going to rise. Meaning, too, in the way other hillmen glance at each other. And all the time Anse is struggling to adjust his body to a rocking earth and pull his feet under him to rise. His feet trying to get a hold slip in the mud but they keep trying. He

knows that as long as he tries to get up he is not defeated. No ring rules here. A man is not beaten in the hills until his body is laid down.

As one in a fever which transforms things into grotesque shapes, Anse's mind struggling to grasp the situation clearly, trying to reason why he is fighting the man who stands towering near him, he thinks suddenly of his sister, his pappy's gal, who ran off with a Falloway. His pappy told him to bring her back.

"Anse, yuh kin fotch Barbara back," he pappy's voice seems to be saying.

A glimmer of light that comes to him through the moment of nightmare. His pappy's words seem to solidify, seem to get under him, seem to pry him loose from the mud and lift him to his feet. He rises, clinging to a handful of mud, and, reason returning, he lets it fly at the eyes of Jabe Morgan.

WITH an accuracy developed by all Meddlesome Creek men in rock throwing, with a sureness of aim equal to a rifle-gun, and which has cut off the head of more than one highland moccasin snake, Anse's throw in this case is perfect. His eyes, mud splattered, his sight blotted out, Jabe can not avoid the rush of Anse's body, the swing of the Meddlesome Creek man's arm that lays him down.

For half a minute Anse watches his enemy stretched out in the mud. Then seeing the men under the porticos rise to stretch or climb on their mules hitched to the racks he walks under the porticos for his rifle-gun.

Mud covered, bleeding, limping, Anse moves down the board walk, crosses the narrow bridge over the branch flowing into Meddlesome and disappears from view of those who continue to sit under the Porticos and whisper.

Anse walks on down the left bank of Meddlesome, follows a well worn trail made by mules and men trafficking between Pennyroyal and the wider, more fertile valleys, tapped by the railroad. His legs feel heavy. He trys to overcome his limping, tries not to reveal the injury done him by Jabe Morgan, as he passes hillmen on the trail who are bound for Pennyroyal. Understanding suddenly why men stare at him and women and hill girls shy off the trail as he approaches, he washes his face in the creek waters and scrapes the drying mud from his shirt and jean pants.

The trail leaves the creek-bed after a while and rises steep and straight to the top of a bald hill. From the summit Anse can see only the peaks of other hills. Below him the trail forks and he hesitates. He has reached the end of familiar land. Beyond the spot upon which he stands he has never ventured. He scratches his head for several minutes and ponders. Then he hears a faint footfall of somebody coming up the hill. He sits down and with his rifle-gun beside him waits. Forces unconcern, apathy to his face. With hill habit he relaxes his body and face. As the foot falls grow louder and he hears the cracking of the brush he lies on his back with his hands under his head and half closes his eyes.

Pretty soon he sees the tall body of a hillman stepping out of the mouth of the right fork of the trail, bending low under the branches of the pines. He does not see Anse until he is almost upon him. The buckles of his galluses shine, flash in a ray of sun. He has a Bible in his hand, and is talking to himself. When he sees Anse he stops abruptly. Talt Allen's boy affects to wake up from a sleep, rubs his eyes and nods.

The stranger wipes his face with a large blue handkerchief while he talks about the steepness of the trail, the heat, and the chiggers that try the religion of men.

A birthmark on the man's face holds Anse's eyes. Long and red on a freshly shaven cheek, it sends Anse's mind hunting. Back some months ago he saw this face over a stand in Milk Sick Cove, way down on Meddlesome in his own district. He remembers that the revival brought the preacher nothing, because the Allens and the Allen kin down to fourth cousins are

not religious. He remembers how the man before him left town, railing and muttering at the sin in the district; this man before him threatening the wrath of God, this burying, preaching, marrying man of God.

"Air yer a-goin' downtrail?" The preacher asks it while he lifts a pants-leg to scratch a chigger.

"Reckon I air."

"Yer hain't a Falloway, air yer?"

"Hain't," says Anse, whipping some dry mud off his jean pants.

"Huh. Reckoned yuh war a Falloway late fer the hitchin." The preacher runs his thumbs through his galluses. "Falloways air shore a lan' o' milk an' honey. Jes' like Canaan in Scripture. Never seed sech doin's. Three fiddlers. Et a whole roast shoat."

The preacher thumbs his Bible. Anse sees a money bill between the leaves.

"Falloways air princes," says the preacher. "Jes' like in Good Book. Ten dollars fer hitchin' a Falloway. Maybe eight bits fer hitchin' other folks. Maybe only victuals. Hillbilly in Pennyrile once give this-un sick shoat fer hitchin' him. Shoat died in this-un's hands afore he could git him home. Huh."

"Who Falloway hitch ter?" asks Anse.

"Allen gal, from ongodly Meddlesome."

"I heerd on her. I shore heard on her," says Anse.

Anse listens to the preacher's long discourse about the Allen gal meeting Bud Falloway on the creek-bed road near Pennyroyal. The wordy preacher tells about the way the Falloway boy lifted Barbara Allen and her mule out of the mud, rescuing her after a heavy rain, when she and her mule were caught in a slide of mud down the mountain. He tells about Falloway and her making up right away, and about Falloway trying for weeks to get word to her to meet him and hitch.

While he listens to the preacher give details about his sister's escape and the hitching, he keeps his eyes down so they will not betray his anger.

"When a gal and man makes up hit hain't ary use a-tryin' ter stop 'em," says the preacher, with a slap of his hand on the Bible. "Wal, 'at Allen gal air shore a-settin' purty."

The preacher adjusts his galluses again.

"Reckon this-un better be a-hustlin'. Weddin' this mawnin. Fun'ral preachin' purty soon in Duckhead. Revival this evenin' in Pennyrile. Lord's business air a-rushin'. Air you-un a-goin' ter Falloway settlement?"

Anse nods.

"An' yer hain't a Falloway?"

TALT ALLEN'S boy looks up at the preacher now. Maybe the look in his eyes tell the preacher something. Maybe Anse's eyes speak before his lips, because the preacher, gathering his tailcoat, steps away.

"I air Talt Allen's boy," says Anse.

The preacher is near a laurel thicket and, with a frightened look and leap, he disappears. Anse fires his rifle-gun blindly toward the thicket, then listens to the pounding of the preacher's feet as they take him down the hill.

Anse moves down the right fork of the trail, the fork the preacher issued from. At the foot of the trail he meets a creek branch and follows its banks for several miles. When he comes to a road made by dry-land sleds he pauses. Looks around until he sees a cabin under the sycamores. He calls to the woman sitting in the doorway. Tells her he is looking for the Falloways.

The woman, old woman stroking her shins, lifts her hands to her mouth, speaks through them.

"Across mountain," she says. "Effen yuh cross mountain an' foller creek-bed an' keep a-goin' agin ol' fire-ball, yuh cain't miss hit. "Cain't miss Falloways. Lan' o' milk an' honey. Right smart folks air Falloways. Heerd ol' man Falloway air smartestdest speecher in all hill country. He shore air progressiondest lawmaker. My boy been way over mountain ter Falloway lan'. My boy say roads air a-goin' ter be fotched hyar.

An' when hit comes we-uns air a-goin' git rich offen fire-coal an' white oak timber. We-uns got whole mountain o' coal. My boy he air a-goin' ter be rich some day. Maybe won' come in my time. Afore long I lay this ol' body daown. Been laid daown long time ago effen ol' man Falloway didn't fotch tooth-dentist daown hyar fer fixin' up this-un's ol' pizened mouth-gums. Reckon you-un heerd on my boy. Name's Noah Hathaway. Hathaways been hyar fer more'n a hundred year. Kilt Shawnee Injuns along this branch. Air yer a Falloway?"

"Hain't," says Anse, taking a step, then stopping again. He stops so that the desire way down in him to say who he is might rise to his throat.

"I air Talt Allen's boy," he says at last.

The woman who is Hathaway scratches her head. Her mouth opens a little. Her brows draw together. She shows that she is looking way back into the past, searching for a link, straining her memory. Anse waiting, watching her puzzled face, sees her at last shake her head.

"Cain't recollec' 'at name. Maybe heerd on hit sometime. Air you-un from Duckhead?"

"We-uns air Meddlesome Crick folks."

"I heerd on Meddlesome. Hit's a fightin' lan', hain't hit?"

Anse takes another step, wondering at the ignorance of folks who never heard of his people.

"Effen yuh see my boy Noah, jes' say you-un seed his maw. He war ter be hyar this mawnin'. Reckon maybe sence he been away he got himself up a gal maybe."

Her voice strings away as Anse begins the climb up the steep trail. Through the thinned pines and the short laurel he walks with his even stride, noting with quick eyes of the hunter every movement. He is on strange land, in a strange country, and the thought makes him cautious. Instinct guides him while some of the things the mountain woman said return to his mind and repeat themselves. He wanted to say a lot of things. If it were a man instead of a woman who talked to him about blood, about warfare against Shawnees, about power of a family, why, he would have had something to say. In a way he feels a deep disgust for the ignorance of folks. To get over the edge of his own familiar Meddlesome Creek country surprises him.

It is one of those long mountains he climbs. A circling road seems to wander to no purpose through thin beech woods, past cliff edges again and again, level itself for miles, and then shoot upward at last to a bald summit. From here the land below unfolds and stretches out into a level valley; wide, long valley cut by a river, dotted with blue and white houses, marked off in varying shades of green. He sees the roads, white and straight, and black dots that move mysteriously along them. He thinks of the words of the preacher, the preacher calling this the land of Canaan.

Again he moves on, begins the descent. Loses view of the valley from time to time as the trail doubles and dips to laurel and rhododendron thickets or meanders between knobs crested with wind whipped pines. And from time to time, with surprising suddenness, the valley bursts into view, making him pause and ponder. He meets a branch and follows the trail that borders it. He begins to feel hungry. Hunger gnaws in him and he stoops to drink of the cold, swift waters. When without warning the valley springs into view again he is at the mouth of the branch and on the bank of the river. He can make out the things that looked to him just like black dots. Above him he sees a machine drawn by six mules, sees men following with shovels and picks. Sees the carts dumping their loads along the river banks.

He walks now toward a lane that leads away from the road builders. Follows the lane until it turns sharply and becomes a road, a street. Here he halts, surprised at the scene before him, the brick business stores, the automobiles, the folks in store clothes. He looks in vain for mules and dry-land sleds. The bustle in Falloway settlement makes him hesitate to walk up its busy main street, yet he fi-

nally moves on; spurred by hunger, he looks for a restaurant. When he is half way up the street he leans against a post in front of a store and studies the fronts of the buildings.

ONE QUESTION will do to find his way to the Falloway home, one question put to any of the passers-by. Yet, he waits, never feeling sure of the way to ask. A strangeness grips him, an insecurity. The corners of his eyes see men glancing at him. Some smile or wink at a companion. When he turns around once he sees the keeper of a business store staring at him. Wherever he looks he sees the name of Falloway. On the bank, the general store, the long building before which men are staring into the innards of an automobile. The name of Falloway seems to flaunt itself before him. Anse, after a while, feels a tap on his shoulder and turns around slowly, his eyes showing astonishment at the familiarity. He frowns and shifts his legs as a man in blue uniform looks him over; sharp eyed man sizing him up from his hat to his boots.

"What you doing here?" The uniformed one folds his arms and bores Anse with steady eyes.

"Hain't a-doin' nothin'! Who air yuh?"

Anse's hard highland eyes look squarely into the stranger's. Conflict of eyes in which neither man gives in. The uniformed man once more sizes up Anse, raises his eyes just long enough to look at his hat.

"You can't do nothin' in this town. No vagrancy in this town. Why you toting that cannon? You're talking to the town marshal. Now, why you toting that cannon?"

A fight goes on within Anse. The rebellion of the mountaineer against being questioned, his hatred of airing his business to strangers, his ago old suspicion, heat his blood. He could resort to the hill habit of silence. He could refuse to answer. Could walk off. But he is here to get his pappy's gal, his own sister, and there is something in the eyes of the town marshal that speaks resolve. Anse does not want to be run out of town. He will fail in his mission.

"Why you toting that cannon?" repeats the marshal.

"Fer squirrels."

"Huh. Squirrels. I wonder what you'd have if you shot a squirrel with that gun. Where you from anyway?"

"I air from Meddlesome."

"Huh. Blockadin' country!"

Anse sees folks stop, or walk slowly past so they can hear. Sees more curious ones form a little knot near the marshal. Sees girls pause to look at him and hears their giggles. Girls with their hair whacked off at the ears and their legs exposed below their knees. Strange land, he thinks, strange land where women cling to children's dresses and wear their hair like men.

"Look at your hat! Full of holes." The marshal says it with a jerk of his head upward.

The folks standing around stare at Anse's hat.

"Bullet holes," says a voice.

"Of course bullet holes," says the marshal. "What's your name?"

"Allen."

Another conflict going on way down in Anse. He is about to say he is Talt Allen's boy. About to fling at the marshal and the smiling men in store clothes a name that works magic wherever he goes. A name that men fear, a name that is more powerful in the Meddlesome country than the sheriff. Yet word might travel of Talt Allen's boy being in town, might tip off Bud Falloway; might interfere with Anse's reaching his sister. On the other hand, there is the danger of his being jugged and held if he does not give some account of himself. He sees the impatience on the town marshal's face; sees him bite his mustache and glance at the group of men back of him.

"I air Talt Allen's boy," Anse says.

The marshal wrinkles his brow. Seems to ponder over the name, then shakes his head.

"Never heard o' this Talt Allen. Who's he?"

The spectators glance at one another, then back at the marshal. A man in riding pants and shiny boots takes the marshal by the sleeve and whispers in his ear. Anse watches the face that is whispering. Seems to him he has seen this moon shaped face before with its button-like nose and small ears. Somewhere he has seen the short squatty body. The hillman's mind goes back to his pappy's lookout on Porky Ridge. The background of the gap suddenly slides in behind the man who is whispering to the marshal.

Half a year since Anse saw this face through the old spyglass, since this moon poked itself through the gap, through the door of Anse's pappy's domain and peered up the forested slope. Long time since this squatty body led men up the trail to his pappy's still and was stopped by a shot from his pappy's hog rifle, that took off the prohibition man's hat.

Anse remembers the weeks and weeks that he and his pappy and brother were hemmed in by this Federal man and his gang that loafed in Milk Sick Cove settlement waiting for the Allens to come out; waiting for the chance to nab Anse's people when they had to come out for provisions, not knowing that the Allens can stand siege of ten years if necessary.

Now the whispering stops. The Government man steps forward with the marshal, stands in front of Anse with the town officer and looks the hillman over, sizes him up from head to foot.

"So you are Talt Allen's boy," says the Federal man. "Guess you're running your dad's corn juice into this town."

THE FEDERAL man turns to the marshal and the bystanders.

"This Talt Allen's notorious. Bet all the liquor we've had in this part of the country lately has come from that Meddlesome Creek district. Leads right back to that crowd, this billy's pappy. What do you think, Marshal? Went into that country with my men and you'd think the sheriff and them would give me some help. I guess not! The minute the sheriff heard I was coming he proceeds to get sick abed. All his deputies, too. Seemed to be a eppydemick of something that just touched county officers. Sick abed and told me and my men just to walk up that trail from the gap and take Talt Allen, easy as pie. Wouldn't be anything to it. Hell, no! Sent us right up to get shot."

Hooking his thumbs in his belt, weighted down with his .45 gun, the Federal man looks hard at Anse for half a minute. Scowls at him and lowers the corner of his mouth.

"Never thought I'd lay eyes on you. We're going to look you over. If there's not a stir in this country, I'm another. Hand over that blunderbuss-gun."

"Got a moonshiner," says a voice in the crowd.

"Six bullet holes in his old hat. Count 'em!" says another.

When a hillman is hard pressed he thinks quickly. He is a strategist born. He can seem dumb but his eyes are as quick as a fox's. When the Federal man's hand reaches forth to receive the rifle-gun, the big bore Winchester, a voice in the crowd says—

"Those fellows can cut off a turkey's head at a hundred yards."

"Come on, hand 'er over!" says the Government man.

Both the prohibition man and the marshal step back as Anse throws up the muzzle of the Winchester and covers him. The marshal tries to edge step by step toward the street, makes a movement toward his hip, but is stopped by Anse's sudden throw of the gun on a line with the town officer's abdomen.

As if from the onslaught of a wave the crowd moves back into two parts, leaving an opening in front of a business store door. From the corner of his eye Anse sees the storekeeper start to close the door and makes a bound for it, reaches the door and turns once more to send the hands of the marshal and the Federal man up. Several others in the crowd throw up their arms.

Backing now, and holding the two

officers outside, Anse reaches a rear window. He sees the storekeeper behind the counter, his eyes looking over a bolt of dry-goods; sees the faces of the two officers beyond the door and the unmoving life on the sidewalk and the street, the crowd frozen. During the seconds that it takes to back to the window these things fill his eyes. As he throws a leg backward over the window sill, he sees the marshal and the Federal man reach for guns. And he sees another man running forward from the other side of the street carrying a rifle. He can see the bolt, knows the rifle is one of those far reaching Mausers. He fires once, bringing down the lamp over the door and sending hands up. The deputy running across the street stops.

The drop from the sill of the back window to the ground is only two feet and Anse, out of the building now and running down a lane, makes for a thicket in front of a house where a woman washes clothes and children play. He gains the far side of the house as the officers come out of the store window and as the crowd peer out of backdoors or windows of other store buildings. He crosses the road in front of the house and runs for an elm grove as shouts come. When he reaches the heart of the woods he ducks behind a tree and looks back. Sees the arms of the children and the woman still pointing in his direction as the officers and the more venturesome of the crowd gather together and talk.

From tree to tree Anse retreats. Sighted by the officers who open fire, he increases his speed. He hears weak thuds of revolver bullets as they strike the trees in his vicinity. When the Mauser begins to crack he becomes more cautious. The bullets from it strike near. One, whistling past his ear, makes him pause behind a large elm tree. Now he sees the posse spreading, making a wide circle around the woods, throwing a cordon. Anse can see the edge of the woods beyond, and in the center of a grove a large blue and white house; big house with porches. Beyond the house the land dips. The tops of the sycamores tell him there is a creek back of the house. There is laurel and there is rhododendron; there is greenbrier. There is cover and the cover is in the direction of Pennyroyal, in the direction of the Meddlesome country, Milk Sick Cove. Home.

Swiftly he thinks of the consequences if he is caught. He has heard of the third degree methods of Federal men. Heard of prisons and of the long terms given liquor blockaders. He recalls hillmen coming home, shamefaced after their sentences were served. Shamefaced because they had allowed themselves to be taken by outsiders and sent up. These thoughts seem to dwarf the dangers of trying to gain the creek bottom beyond.

The crossing of the fifty yards of clearing between the woods and one of the outbuildings of the big blue and white house seem as nothing compared to going to prison and having to come back sometime, a shamed, a defeated man. In his own country capture would be different. The name of Allen means something. The strangeness of this land in which he is now a fugitive grows upon him. A longing grows within him. The fifty yards to the outbuilding is so much nearer home.

Anse, glancing in all directions, sees the cordon swinging around, getting ahead of him. Pretty soon he will be cut off from the creek, from the fastness of the laurel. Once there he has a chance. A hillman in the tight laurel is secure. Thus the boy of Talt Allen makes a run for it. He hears revolver and rifle fire, hears the revolver bullets strike short of their mark in the turf. Hears the singing of the mauser bullets past his head, all very near him, and getting nearer all the time. Through the open gate of the picket fence he runs. Changes his course suddenly, swerves quickly and makes for the front door of the big blue and white house.

During the seconds that it takes to make the porch it comes to him that the door was not open when he left the woods. He intended running behind the big house, putting the house between himself and the edges of the cordon of men

and gaining the tight laurel by the creek beyond. The door was closed against him like everything else in this unfriendly town, but now it is open. Without knowing why he leaps the steps to the door, drawing rifle and revolver fire. Short range Colt guns thud in the yard behind him, but the Mauser finds his shoulder.

A numbness creeps to his neck, his head. The hallway seems dim and long and the face of his sister Barbara, his pappy's gal, is a picture that lasts only a second before it is blotted out.

SEMI-DARKNESS surrounds him. A light flickers beyond him on a table. He watches it. It blinks at him like an eye. He trys to move but is stopped by sharp pains in his shoulder and neck. There is mystery in the corner of the strange room where he lies, a figure in mystery, too, which can not attach itself to a past. Through half-closed eyes he sees the pictures dimly outlined on the walls around him, the knick-knacks on a table near the lamp, the mirror framed against the wall, the curtains before the windows. It is like the scenes in the picture-papers and books sent his sister and maw by the "cheerful letter" folks up North. The posts of the bed shooting up, the white "kiver" covering him, are like the pictures.

He raises his head a little, bringing pain to his shoulder again; breaking up the mystery in the corner, the figure that stirs from a big chair and comes toward him now, swiftly.

"Air hit a-hurtin'?"

It is his sister, his pappy's gal who speaks, speaks close to him. Barbara, who looks different somehow. Not her shoes and stockings and "tafferter", maybe, that make her look different. Nor her hair which is brought up and tied with a ribbon. The difference lies in her face, in her eyes. Again she asks him if it hurts, this bullet in his shoulder.

"Hain't a-hurtin'," he says in a whisper.

She looks at him as she rearranges the bed cover.

"Hain't ary bullet in yer now. Doctor dug hit out. Dug hit out las' evenin'. 'At crazy-simple deputy plugged yuh. Wal, Bud, my man, air a-goin' ter have him fire-booted outten office. 'Cain't shoot up my woman's kin,' says Bud. You-un air a-goin' be all right, Anse. A-goin' ter be walkin' in a jiffy."

Anse watches her blow out the lamp and raise the shades. The room fills with light. He sees the valley, the big green valley cut with fences and lanes, and the rugged hills beyond. Sees the first burst of the sun over a hilltop. Everywhere are men and mules working. The machine is cutting wide swaths in the black earth, the fertile bottom land.

"Yander air Bud," says Barbara. "Bud air bossin' men out yander. Road's a-goin' ter be in Pennyrile arter a while. A-goin' down Meddlesome. Folks kin spin along on hit clar ter Milk Sick and beyond. Bud's pappy air shore right smart ter git these things from lowland lawmakers."

He is going to be up in a jiffy, his sister said. But where is he going when he is up and around? He can not take his sister, his pappy's gal, back. Can not take her away from these things she is now looking at with pride, the things on her walls, the knick-knacks on the table, the fertile valley beyond, her man who is bossing the road gang. He can not go home without her. Defiance of his pappy is useless when he is home. He would not be taking her back as she was anyway, even if he could trick the Falloways which is not possible. He could not trick *her*, or force her, if he wanted to.

What is she trying to say to him now? She has opened her mouth several times to speak, has jerked her eyes away from the pictures on the wall several times and looked at him.

"I air a-wonderin'," she says. "I air a-wonderin' effen you-un want a work-job. Right smart money in hit. My man Bud kin git you-un up a work-job."

She knows why he came. Why he can not go back home. His sister, his pappy's gal, is throwing out a line for him to catch. He looks out of the window again.

Sees the machine cutting its wide swath in the earth, the mules and men moving about, down in the valley. He makes a mind picture of the road; he lays it out in his mind from Falloway to Milk Sick Cove, to his pappy's domain. The road narrows to a thread in his mind. Its ends tie themselves around his pappy and his sister Barbara.

" 'Roads jine folks,' Bud's pappy say. 'Roads air a-goin' ter jine hills ter United States,' say Bud's pappy."

"She knew what I was thinking," says Anse to himself.

His lips are dry. He moistens them with his tongue. His face is hot. He tells her that he wants to work on the road, that he wants to tie one end of the thread around his pappy's cabin and the other end around her big blue and white house.

"Yo're fever-burnin'," she says, and gives him a glass of water.

He hears her say that he will be up in a quick jiffy to help her man, Bud. His mind clutches the image again, the thread that now seems to knit through the hills, wrapping one of its ends around his pappy's cabin, and the other end around a big blue and white house, down in the valley.

JEROME—NOT THE SAINT

By WILLIAM ASHLEY ANDERSON

I MADE his acquaintance on an army transport on the African coast. He had a grievance against the adjutant of the ship. He had many grievances, and he told them all to me, bitterly, incisively, eloquently. We were strangers at the time, but entered easily into the camaraderie our uniforms inspired.

The transport was a long, lop sided relic of the China service with a sharp list to port. We had sixty-three different details on board, made up of many races from Kavirondo savages to Scotsmen. Every square foot of space was crowded, from keelson to truck. The heat was equatorial; there was an irregular rolling sea that made the old ship kick up its heels with staggering lurches that brought pæans from the depths of the stifling holds.

It was the adjutant's job to inspect the ship daily in all its remotest parts; and afterward, seasick and miserable, to take over the duties of the orderly room; post guards, details, and so forth.

Jerry's chief grievance was that orders of the day were posted in illegible longhand. He insisted, on the second day out of Dar-es-Salaam, having just made my acquaintance, upon showing me all the crudities of one of these sheets. I groaned in agreement with all his strictures. On this basis of mutual understanding an enduring friendship was born.

For I was the hapless adjutant!

Jerry was a famous character, and a fast and loyal friend.

He had originally enlisted in the first Canadian contingent, having made a timely arrival at Vancouver from Sumatra. His only action with the Canadians, however, occurred on the day they landed in Scotland and found the dockers on strike. In the battle that ensued it is variously estimated that between eleven and twenty-eight men were killed, though the news of this affair was, of course, never published, nor were any medals awarded.

Jerry got tired of parading on Salisbury Field when it seemed likely that the war would end before the Canadians could

have a chance to fight! He therefore asked permission to transfer to a Lancashire regiment that was under orders to embark; and when the request was declined with contumely and threats, Jerry resigned from the Canadians and marched off in his mackinaw and Baden-Powell hat, thinly disguised as a Lancashireman.

Instead of going to France, however, the transport went to Africa; and there Jerry went through three years of brutal campaigning. In that campaigning the casualties were seven times greater in proportion to the forces engaged than were the casualties in France; namely, 2,800 entries into hospital for every 1,000 men. Deaths were around three hundred thousand. No official list was ever published, because only a small proportion of whites were engaged in that area. But of the whites, the South African contingent went in twenty thousand strong and were withdrawn six months later with only eight thousand effectives left. A white man was good for only five days' active service.

I have seen the environs of a camp literally littered with human bones; and once after an epidemic of spinal meningitis we received a querulous inquiry from the quartermaster's department to know who would pay for the blankets in which we were obliged to bury our men for lack of coffins.

The only time Jerry was off active duty was when he was sentenced to fifty-six days in quod for refusing to obey an order that an ignorant officer had no right to give. So thoroughly and eloquently did Jerry justify himself when he returned to duty that no entry was made against him on his service papers for fear of complications. That small detail enabled Jerry later to receive a commission.

In appearance Jerry resembled a very likeable Napoleon, but slimmer, taller, more powerful; tan, with black curly hair instead of the dank stuff that hung over Bonaparte's marble brow. Jerry was intensely passionate, intensely genial. His charm of manner was completely disarming, his rage devastating. Women loved him, when he had time for them. He had much erudition, tremendous nerve, and was one of the shrewdest and best informed men I ever met.

He was the soldiers' lawyer in his battalion—an infuriating personality to the adjutant, who was his natural enemy. Once after a series of technical offenses which could not be charged against him, the adjutant sent for him, and read to him from a book on Wellington's Peninsular campaign. The passage related to Wellington's rigorous discipline; and told how when he had given special orders that *under no circumstances* should a private break ranks without an order, and two broke step at a mud puddle, he had them shot for disobedience! The adjutant himself was a lawyer in civil life, and Jerry knew he could never resist the temptation to argue.

"Do you mean to say, sir," demanded Jerry, "that that is the principle upon which this campaign is being conducted?"

"I mean to say the spirit of discipline must be strictly adhered to!"

"Do you mean to say—"

"Get out of here!" roared the adjutant.

ABOUT a month later the battalion had just returned from a fatiguing route march, and had formed in mass waiting for the order to dismiss. Before the order could be given, however, a sudden torrential downpour sent every one scurrying to shelter. The water fell like a smothering cloudburst. When it cleared half an hour later, and curious heads began to poke out of the *bandas* to see what damage the flood had done, there in the middle of the parade-ground stood a strange object rooted in the mud.

Being a man of curious nature, the adjutant went forth to investigate. Three-quarters of the way across the field he recognized Jerry.

"What the hell do you mean?" he yelled. "This is going too far!"

"It means this," shouted Jerry, whose whimsical humor had been changed to fury under the force of the downpour, "if you're not a hypocrite you'll have every

damn' man in the battalion shot for not waiting for orders!"

Once a claim was presented by a Greek planter for damage done his rubber plantation by soldiers. He claimed that they had cut down his trees for firewood. Being a Greek, his claim was enormous. The colonel in charge was very dubious over the matter. The basis of the claim was clear. The trees had been destroyed by the soldiers. But the amount claimed seemed to be utterly exorbitant. Remembering that Jerry was an expert on tropical agriculture, the colonel sent for him, and assigned him to the case to assess the damage. In due course Jerry reported. That report has since been quoted in speeches and text-books on the agricultural possibilities of East Africa.

In it Jerry demonstrated conclusively that rubber can not be grown profitably in East Africa; and that any planter who persisted in the maintenance of rubber trees was bound to face an increasing loss with each succeeding year. In conclusion he proved that the Greek owed the British government a very large sum for stopping his otherwise inevitable losses!

Jerry was one of the most loyal men I ever met.

Before the war he had become engaged to the daughter of his employer, a wealthy lumberman in Canada. The wedding was postponed more than once because Jerry was not willing to have his wife depending on her father for her income, though there was no immediate prospect of increasing his own fortunes in Canada. He had prospects in Sumatra.

One day he went down to the docks, worked as a stevedore all day long, smuggled his trunks aboard, and stowed himself away, bound for the Orient. At sea he got in the good graces of the captain. By changing from ship to ship he finally reached Singapore; and thence Sumatra.

In Sumatra, he made what he considered a sufficient stake, and started back for Vancouver. While on the way war was declared. On his arrival, he told his fiancée it would be unfair to her for him to marry her before the war was over. He thought this would be a matter of six months; and off he went.

Four years later he returned to Vancouver.

I met him in New York bound for Africa once more. But he was not alone. The girl who waited for him through those long dubious years was outward bound with him. Of course I was overjoyed.

"But where are you going?"

He told me his plan was to establish himself as a planter in German East Africa. I knew that for political reasons this was impossible. No concessions were procurable in the mandated territory. Nevertheless, Jerry continued on his way with complete assurance.

After besieging the Colonial Office, he at length reached the ear of a haughty underling who exercised considerable influence. During the course of a conversation that was becoming acrimonious a dignified personage entered the office and, caught by some remark of Jerry's, stood silently listening, until the underling observed him, and rose confusedly and deferentially to his feet. Jerry thereupon turned his attention to the newcomer with very satisfactory results. A promising interview was arranged for the following day.

"Do you know who that was?" said the underling in awed accents when the personage had departed. "That is Lord Say-And-Do, the under-secretary!"

"Is that so?" said Jerry disappointedly. 'I thought it was Lord Curzon."

My last letter from Jerry was written from the slopes of Kilimanjaro, where he has a large coffee plantation, with the glorious crest of Africa's greatest mountain touching the sky behind him. Brawling streams foam on either side of his estate; every imaginable kind of fruit grows upon his place; and for the sake of companionship his wife has acquired the following pets: an eland, a dik-dik, two zebras, an ostrich, a chetah leopard and a baboon. Jerry's name will be stamped large upon Central Africa.

BUGLES

A Novelette of the Venezuelan Llanos

By ARTHUR O. FRIEL

CHAPTER I

DESERTERS

DON ARNALDO CHANARO, rancher, *hacendado*, owner of one of the largest estates in the Venezuelan state of Guárico, awoke to a new day.

Through the wide, glassless windows of his airy room flooded the first radiance of a reborn sun, summoning him peremptorily from the somnolence of equatorial darkness. As usual, he smilingly obeyed.

His long muscular arms arose to grip the headboard. His long bronzed face grew longer in a yawn. His long sinewy body stretched itself. Then, with a sidewise fling of the single sheet which had covered him, he was up and striding to the window, vigorous, vital, to breathe deeply and look across the limitless *llanos* on which grazed his innumerable cattle.

For minutes he stood there, filling capacious lungs with the morning freshness which soon would be erased by hard heat; gazing narrow eyed, but curve lipped, into the face of the blinding god of day. Like the bygone Incas of the far westward Andes, he was something of a worshiper of the sun; also of the moon and the stars. That was the chief reason why he dwelt here at his ancestral estate, on the clear skied plains, instead of in metropolitan Caracas, farther north. And, though he believed in the Christian God and made no obeisance to the pagan deity, he seldom neglected his prompt waking and cheerful fronting of the fiery divinity.

Then, as he turned back to shed pajamas and don outdoor clothing, his bright face clouded with a shadow deeper than that cast by the sun. Beyond the unornamented wall bordering his big bed was his wife's room, over-ornate. And, despite the solidity of the barrier, he could see her pettish eyes and peevish lips as clearly as if that wall were glass; the pretty but perverse face of a woman who, after exerting every wile to capture a moneyed man, had tired of her catch.

Town bred, she found nothing in sun or moon or stars; felt nothing but her own febrile impulses, saw nothing but her futile ambitions, balked by the careful protection of her husband and the monotonous isolation of ranch life. True to type, she daily engendered additional spite against the man who had lifted her from not-too-genteel poverty but thwarted her social schemes by insisting on living in his own way. And Arnaldo suffered in consequence. Unlike many another Venezuelan, he could not bring himself to accept the situation philosophically and find pleasure in the arms of some other woman. He still cared only

for the one to whom he had given his name.

Now, as he drew on the protective garments of daytime, he subconsciously braced himself against the querulous petulance which he always faced at the breakfast board. He had long grown used to it, as to the malevolence of midday heat. It was an inevitable ordeal, to be borne with fortitude; and he never dodged ordeals. Yet this morning he was to be spared the customary unpleasantness—only to meet a greater.

Knuckles knocked at the door. A voice diffident, yet urgent, called—

"Señor!"

"Yes?"

In three long steps he reached the door, snapped back a bolt, opened the way. At the threshold stood the mestiza housekeeper, yellow face perturbed.

"Señor!" she gasped. "The señora—She is gone!"

"What!" barked the master. "You—"

"Gone! Her door is open. I looked in. Nobody is there!"

For an instant the chill gray eyes of her lord pierced to the depths of her being. Then his right hand shot out and spun her aside. As she reeled against the balcony railing he sprang out, turned sharp, leaped to the next room. There he stopped short.

The news was true. The door was open and the room empty of life. The bed was hardly wrinkled. A wardrobe stood wide, its dresses gone. The lid of a chest was up against the wall. Drawers of a tall bureau were pulled out, and one, entirely removed, rested on a chair. The dressing table was bereft of its vanity tools.

His darting gaze came back to the pillows. Their smoothness showed that his señora had not gone to bed, nor even

lain down for a moment. She had planned to flee, and had fled, early in the night; as soon as she could pack her belongings and make her way out undetected.

Starting out of his paralysis, he strode in, eyes roving again. If she had gone of her own free will she would not have neglected one final fling at him. On the bureau top he found it, an open sheet of paper on which was scribbled:

> *Adios*, pig! Stay with your animals and live out your boorish life with them! I go from this endless death to life! Do not follow! You will never find me!

The exclamatory sentences were characteristic, as was the hatefulness of the whole note.

He read it twice, mind meanwhile leaping to the questions of where she had gone, and how. Then he became aware of the avid gaze of the servant, absorbing every detail of his looks and actions as meat for later gossip. And, despite brain turmoil, his stiff Spanish pride steeled him. He achieved a careless laugh.

"AH, YES," he remarked. "The señora has gone to visit her mother at Caracas. She has spoken of it several times. Serve breakfast. Then put things here in order."

"*Sí, señor.*"

She turned, walked dutifully toward the staircase. But then, as he emerged, she stopped, hesitated, spoke out.

"Señor, pardon, but—you should know. That smooth fellow Teófilo Funereo has been with the señora much of late when you were out riding. I have—I have wished to tell you—but I was afraid."

"What!" he snapped, sudden fury darkening his face.

She shrank back, voiced frightened apology. In an instant, however, he regained his grip on himself.

"I know all about that," he coldly lied. "Be off about your business!"

"*Sí, sí!*"

She scuttled downstairs. He stood a second, jaws clenched, nails digging deep into his palms. Then, with external calm, he descended after her and walked to the stout doored, grille windowed room which he used as office. The door was shut. But it yielded readily to his push. Inside, he stopped, once more rigid.

On the floor, clean last night, lay littered papers and ledgers. And the ponderous iron chest which served as his safe was open. The clumsy old lock had been picked. All the money which had laid inside—twenty thousand bolívares in gold and silver—was gone.

He kicked the door shut behind him. Then, unobserved, he paced up and down the room, swearing in harsh whispers.

The story was plain enough. The suave, good looking Funereo had looted the hacienda of both its money and its mistress; Funereo, the vagabond who, starving, had staggered in off the plains and had been given food and clothes and the easy job of bookkeeper. The snaky scoundrel had bitten the hand that fed him; bitten deep, with fangs that pentrated to the inmost soul of his victim. A fortnight ago he had incurred a reprimand for laziness and incipient insolence. This was his revenge.

A few minutes of tigerish striding and sibilant cursing served to harden the betrayed man's fiery rage into stony resolution. For the stolen money he cared comparatively little; he had much more than that in bank at Caracas, and his bovine wealth out on the open range far exceeded his cash deposits. For the faithless wife he still cared much; but he was willing to give her the freedom she craved, though not as she had taken it. He would overtake her, escort her to Caracas, turn her over to her parents, make provision for her with his bankers, and so leave her. With the snake Funereo he would settle summarily, on sight.

Hard mouthed, hard eyed, he gathered up the scattered accounts, dumped them into the chest, lowered the lid. Thereafter he opened the window shutters, sat at his desk, lighted a *cigarrillo* and pulled

a bell cord summoning his majordomo.

"Alfredo," he said easily, "send at once for Santiago, the chief foreman. Also tell Maria to serve my breakfast *muy pronto*, and to prepare lunches for a dozen riders. *Vaya!*"

"*Sí, señor! Inmediatamente!*"

Santiago, the foreman, arrived before the breakfast; a lean, keen eyed, quick brained rider of the ranges. To him said the master, in the same tranquil tone:

"Santiago, last night one or two persons rode from here with something of value. The trail probably runs north, on the Caracas road. Send out good trackers at once to find sign. Have them circle this place and, when they have caught the trail, follow it far enough to be sure, then come in and report. Meanwhile prepare yourself and ten more men to ride with me. That is all."

The foreman wheeled and went without vocal response. He seldom wasted words. His creed was action.

Before his master's frugal meal was finished Santiago was back, sweaty shirt and breeches testifying that he had not only dispatched trackers but gone himself.

"A mile north on the Caracas road we found this," he tersely reported. "The men are ready."

He handed over a small, rumpled handkerchief, slightly stained by roadway dust. Chanaro's lips thinned. The expensive *pañuelo* was one of his wife's.

"Very well," he responded, rising. "We go."

SO THEY went; a dozen hard riders on fleet horses; men toughened to long journeys, armed with rifles, belted with cartridges, led by a grim Spaniard who carried only a long revolver and a lethal hate. That single weapon and that rancorous urge were enough for the leader. His fearless followers were but auxiliary power for use against possible bandits. But they did not know that, and they rode eagerly, well aware, though no explanation had been given, that they were on a blood trail.

They rode, and rode, and rode. A dozen miles north they crossed a deep, narrow creek, seeing nothing worth notice, giving it no thought. They rode up into the Maritime Andes and all the way into Caracas, the national capital. And nowhere did Arnaldo Chanaro find his quarry.

Neither his wife's relatives nor any one else there knew anything of her. Detectives could not find her. Nor could they find any recent trace of the man Funereo who, his pursuer learned, was earnestly wanted by the police to answer charges of forgery and robbery. And after a week of extensive, expensive search the avenger rode back home, baffled.

Again he crossed the silent creek, regarding it more attentively now. He even hunted along its banks for a mile or two, finding no sign. Then he went on to his isolated ranch, to live with his cattle and his people and to wait for news from somewhere.

Weeks later came word which seemed the answer to his enigma.

That creek flows into the Rio Guárico, which runs south to the Rio Apure, which in turn enters the great Orinoco. Some two hundred miles down that Orinoco stands the city of Ciudad Bolívar, whence a passenger steamer plies to the English island of Trinidad, where ocean liners drop anchor. Thus, wily fugitives ostensibly riding north to Caracas could force their horses into the small stream, swim them down to a hidden canoe, kill them, and depart into the south, while pursuers deluded by a dropped handkerchief and a fixed idea pressed on northward. So they could make their way to North America or to Europe.

Much too late, Don Arnaldo realized this. Recognizing also the facts that the refugees could not be overtaken if they had gone that way, and that they might not have gone that way at all, he wasted no more time on a wild goose chase. Sometime, his stars told him, he would learn what had become of the treacherous pair. Then he would follow Funereo to the world's end—yes to the depths of hell,

if necessary—and wreak on his slick head full vengeance.

But the vague tidings which at length drifted up from the southern wilderness robbed him of even that anticipative satisfaction. A man and a woman in a canoe on the Rio Guárico had been caught by roving savages. The man had been killed, the woman carried off to lingering wretchedness. No more was known.

For weeks Chanaro and his best riders scoured the plains in futile efforts to find that woman. The Indians had vanished like wind blown smoke. Their white captive would never again be seen by whites. Not even her identity could be learned. So, at last, the searchers trotted wearily back to their own land. And their leader sat alone in his office, contemplated a photograph on his desk, laid it face down in a drawer and turned a key.

"So be it," he muttered.

Then he blew out the light, climbed his staircase, and sat for a long time moodily gazing at the cold moon.

CHAPTER II

REVOLT

MISFORTUNES seldom come singly. Especially in Venezuela. To the state of Guárico came a new governor; a greedy, unscrupulous governor of the type all too common in Latin America; a predatory beast in the shape of a man, as hungry for wealth as a jaguar for blood, and as ruthless in seeking to satisfy his insatiable appetite. Promptly he pounced on Chanaro, one of the richest men of the region. By machinations typical of his kind, he put his victim in a false light with the federal government, then confiscated his estate.

The rancher fought back. He went to Caracas to fight. But it was a losing combat. Every blow launched in self-defense was smoothly smothered by two members of the presidential cabinet, who had engineered the appointment of the governor and shared his gains. When they found their antagonist to be hitting too hard they retaliated—but not openly. They thrust underhandedly. Only a surreptitious warning enabled Chanaro to evade attack by hired assassins. And only his own good sense in immediately thereafter departing to his ranch foiled further attempts at murder.

Rage though he might, he knew the cards were so stacked against him that he could not win justice. But, as he fled, he vowed to repay chicanery with revolt. And he kept that vow.

Adherence to his resolution was all the easier when he found, on his return, that a murrain had smitten his herds. Already they were decimated by the mysterious pestilence which occasionally sweeps the *llanos*. Soon they would be exterminated.

On learning this he smiled a bitter smile. The governor and the vultures were welcome to the thousands of diseased carcasses strewing the plains. He himself, robbed of his wife by a trusted employee, of his money by the government, and of his animals by malign fate, now had nothing to hold him back. He could fly free as a hawk, swoop on his prey, dart away to new conquests, giving no thought to what lay behind. So he did.

He called together his men. From near and far they came, abandoning the dying herds at his behest. They came, glum, moody, aware that the master who so long had treated them justly was ruined, knowing they could find no other who would be so considerate. Thanks to the two new blights on the land—governor and plague—the other ranchers of Guárico were in no better case than Chanaro; and most of them were, at best, stingy to their peon men and vile toward the peon women. Now that oppression and epidemic stalked across their country, uttermost misery could not be far behind. Yet perhaps El Señor knew of a way to continue their existence. And, trusting to him, they came, on horseback, on muleback, on foot, to hear his words.

When all had arrived he spoke. Tall,

lean, eagle faced, he stood on a small balcony above his front door, where he could see every yellow or brown visage and reach every ear. He wasted no time on forensics. He talked with the directness of any rider addressing his fellows.

"*Hombres*, I am through here," he announced. "I have gone to Caracas and found no justice. I have barely escaped assassination. I have saved my life, but nothing else. Our beloved governor and our noble national government have stolen everything I owned. There is also the plague. But that will die out after the next rainy season, as usual. If the political vampires had let us alone we could have started anew next year. But it is those bloodsuckers who have ruined us. God is merciful, and would have allowed us to prosper again. The government is merciless, and will starve us if we continue to bow our necks. I will no longer bow to tyranny. Instead I will strike it in the face and spit in its eyes!"

He paused, scanning the bronze countenances of the plainsmen. Narrowing lids, hardening jaws, growling exclamations proved them wholly in sympathy with him.

"You men are no longer my men—unless you will to be," he went on. "With no money, I can not pay you. With no cattle, I can not feed you. I can offer you only one thing—revenge on our oppressors. If you wish to follow me you shall have it. If not, I will take it alone! That is all."

A silence, succeeded by a growing buzz like the approach of swarming bees. Smouldering eyes flamed. Faces shone with the light of reckless daring. Teeth gleamed in wolfish grins. Out broke a stentorian voice—

"*Viva la revolución!*'

LIKE a powder keg ignited by a spark, the crowd burst into a thunderous roar. But the noise subsided as quickly as it had erupted. Chanaro had shot up a silencing hand.

"It is not revolution," he corrected. "It is retribution. It is my own war against injustice. I will not join any revolutionary army. I will not attempt to overthrow the president. We are too few for that. But I will drive that crocodile of a governor out of Guárico, disgrace him and his bloodsucking backers in Caracas, or die trying! And all who follow me must be prepared to die with me. Think well on that point, men. We shall be outlawed, and after we start we can not turn back. Now I give you half an hour to talk among yourselves and choose your course."

With a wave of the hand he stepped back into the house. There he did not need to wait half an hour, or even half a minute, for response. Another voice boomed another yell—

"*Viva Arnaldo!*"

It was the resonant bass of the usually silent Santiago. The roaring chorus which echoed and reechoed that shout persisted for minutes. And Arnaldo Chanaro, unseen, gulped and passed a hand across eyes suddenly wet. Seldom before had one of his employees used his first name, and then only with the respectful prefix of "Don". Now, hearing it called and wholeheartedly cheered without ceremonious title, he knew that in his financial ruin he had something more precious than all the gold of Caracas: the loyal love of strong men.

Nevertheless, he held himself from their sight until the specified thirty minutes had elapsed and mercurial enthusiasm had sunk to cool determination. Meanwhile he paced about the upper story of the house he was leaving forever. Thus prowling, he entered the room whence his wife had flown. He found it looted. In his absence at the capital his housekeeper, Maria, had absconded with the abandoned belongings of her fugitive mistress.

"Women!" he muttered. "Snakes!"

And, shutting the door again, he put away all women from his life.

When the half hour ended he descended the stairs. On his threshold he looked calmly forth at the compact group which awaited his leadership. As

he had foreseen, it was not so large as the first ebullient crowd. Men influenced by family considerations or other misgivings had quietly departed. Yet at least two thirds of his former servitors remained. They were not noisy now. They stood silent, steady eyed, orderly, awaiting commands. At their head was Santiago, sombrero tilted over the right eye, nonchalant readiness in his poise. After a survey of all the company Arnaldo's gaze came back to him.

"Santiago, you are my lieutenant, second in command," he announced. "You will appoint *sargentos*. They will form up the men, examine all weapons and horses, and report to you. Appoint them now. Then come to me in the office."

Not a muscle of Santiago's iron jawed face changed, but his brown eyes gleamed with pride. His right hand arose awkwardly, attempting military salute but ignorant of the correct motion.

"Never mind that," instructed his chief. "Leave those movements to the uniformed monkeys of the government. The answer is: '*Sí, capitán!*' "

"*Sí, capitán!*" heartily echoed Santiago.

With that he strode forward, stood on the steps, swept the others with critical gaze, counting them, choosing his sergeants. His captain faded away into the office and waited.

With the skilful judgment which had raised him from common *llanero* to head man, Santiago cut up his haphazard horde into a squadron of rough riding cavalry. Thereafter, while the turmoil of organization and inspection took place, he joined his commander, reporting briefly, listening attentively.

"The principal question is the condition of the horses," stated Chanaro. "The spirit of the men is unquestionable. Their arms are deficient, thanks to our beloved government. But courage is worth more than bullets. And if the horses will carry us far and fast we shall get better weapons *pronto*. We shall ride tomorrow at dawn for Calabozo."

"*Cra!*" ejaculated Santiago, somewhat startled.

CALABOZO, capital of the state of Guárico, was the governor's headquarters, protected by a federal garrison. As the ruined rancher had said, his riders were poorly armed, thanks to the national government, which, ever fearing overthrow, ever strove to keep its subjects weaponless—though with only partial success. The men of the mountains and plains, knowing that the aforesaid government would give them no protection in case of need, protected themselves by obtaining arms wherever they could and using them as they must. Consequently the Chanaro ranch was by no means defenseless.

But between the defense and offense existed a wide difference, particularly when the offense was against trained, fortified soldiers.

After a straight look into his commander's resolute eyes, however, Santiago said no more. In fact, he grinned thinly.

"There is a proverb," dryly added the avenger, "that in every gathering of more than four men there is at least one fool. That estimate may be excessive. But it is a safe wager that in every hundred men there is at least one loose tongue. So we shall mount and ride at daybreak, before news of our revolt can spread far. Meanwhile you will make everything ready—and tell no man where we are to go."

"*Sí*," curtly assented Santiago. "That is all?"

"All."

"*Bien*." He swung out of the office.

His commander turned an ironic smile northward.

"Paternal government," he murmured, "your mistress Guárico has borne you a new child. I wish you joy of it!"

It was no empty jest. Revolt, fathered by injustice, mothered by bitterness, was full born and about to hit out with both fists.

CHAPTER III

ATTACK

AT DAWN the rebels rode south, leaving behind the wide expanse of bare levels and slants, brushy creeks, palmy meadows, among which they had led so leisurely a life; and no man looked back.

Some had rifles, some shotguns, some revolvers; some no firearms at all; but every one had a machete, a poniard, a good horse under him and a fight ahead of him. And none lagged. In fact, Capitán Arnaldo and Teniente Santiago, leaders, had some ado to prevent their own steeds from being pushed into headlong gallop by the impatient zest of their followers.

"You'll lose that," presently predicted their hard bitted lieutenant.

But, for once, he proved a false prophet. Through months and years to come, they never did.

All day they rode. At sundown they camped a scant league from Calabozo. Two hours before the new dawn they arose, ate without fires or lights, saddled, rode on again. And at the first light of day they entered the capitol of Guárico.

Save for the soft clatter of unshod hoofs on a poorly paved road, they came as quietly as shadows of the dissolving night. Before waking townsmen or dozing sentries realized that the equine feet were not those of early burros bound for market, the ghostly cavalcade had stopped—to become tigerish infantry which sneaked swiftly on the small fort and, with sudden rush, captured it. Only a few shots were fired. Then the stronghold was in the hands of the phantasmal enemies who, led by a grim mouthed Spaniard, had come from God knew where.

At sound of those transient shots, a detachment led by a hard eyed ex-foreman stormed the residence of the governor. Shouting, shooting, battering at doors and windows, they covered every exit and, eventually, pounded their way in. Meanwhile hordes of half clad Calabozans watched with silent relish, none lifting a hand in defense of their ruler, who was disliked even more in his town than in the wilds of his misgoverned state. But when the nut was cracked its kernel was gone.

The mysterious Spaniard, marching to the gubernatorial *palacio* with most of his jubilant men and all his crestfallen prisoners, swore luridly on learning that his quarry was not captured. He stormed even more harshly when informed by an obsequious townsman that the governor must have eluded his seekers by some trick, since he had certainly been in his house last night. But then his words stopped, and across his black mustached lips flitted a peculiar smile.

"The honorable gentleman has a wife or a mistress, I dare say," he quizzed.

"*Sí, sí, mi general,*" grinned the informer. "Several of them."

"*Muy bien.*" The conqueror turned to his lieutenant. "You found a woman here?" he guessed.

"*Sí.*"

"Bring her to me."

When a frightened but quick eyed girl in *déshabille* was produced, he smiled at her. She swiftly reciprocated and posed with renewed confidence and coquetry. This new, dominant paramour was much better looking than the one just gone.

"Where, *chiquita*, did that coward go?" he questioned. "Let us get rid of him now. Then he can not disturb us later."

Her teeth flashed as she swallowed his bait.

"The old rat ran into a closet and locked the door from the inside, *caballero*," she responded. "Come! I will show you!"

She led the way eagerly. Behind her back Santiago grinned at his *capitán*, who replied with a flitting grimace of contempt. Both followed her to the closet door. As she had said, it was locked.

"Break it!" Chanaro ordered men who, unbidden, had come after him.

THEY smashed it. Beyond, they found only clothes. But the girl, once more alarmed and all the more anxious to gain favor, scanned the covert narrowly and discovered that the rear wall was false. It was another door, which, pushed inward, revealed steep steps and a tunnel.

The tunnel led to another house, uninhabited. Though thoroughly searched, it revealed nothing. So, with a shrug, the commander led his men back to the gubernatorial lair.

"Let the rat run," he bade. "We have taken this town once; we can take it again. The next time we may catch him. Now there are matters more important."

Thereafter he held summary court. Ignoring the fawning girl, he confronted his uneasy captives.

"You," he declared, "are fools. Get out of the army, and stay out! You are trained monkeys. Be men! Live your own lives! Let the dirty politicians go to the devil who waits for them! That's all. Leave town and keep going!"

Dazed, officers and privates stared at him. All the privates were conscripts, serving their time. All the officers were at Calabozo only because of inescapable orders. Every one hated the ovenlike place and was only too glad to go. But the mildest fate they had expected was the usual alternative of joining this unknown rebel band or being shot. Freedom to go their ways unhindered seemed incredible.

"I mean it," asserted their conqueror. "You could not join my band if you would. I use men, not monkeys. And I won't waste bullets on you. We shoot men, not monkeys. If ever you turn into men and wish to ride with me, then I may talk to you again. Meanwhile, *adios!* Lieutenant, see that these uniformed apes are given food and escorted to the Caracas road."

"*Sí, capitán!*" barked Santiago. "Outside, you!"

The federals went, rankling under the victor's disdain but by no means ungrateful for his leniency. In fact, few of them ever again lifted gun against the raider who had let them off so lightly.

Thereupon he turned to the state safe; an iron chest, like his own, but larger and, as he presently learned, much better filled. The key was gone with the governor. But a greasy nosed, unshaven Calabozan, whom some one thoughtfully summoned, proved quite adroit at tickling a lock with a piece of wire. His reward was exactly the same as that which went to each of the irregular cavalry—a handful of coins scooped up, uncounted, by the commander. No man received more than that. And Arnaldo himself took none.

When every man of his force had been given his fistful, much money still remained. For a moment Arnaldo looked down at it, cogitating. Then spoke the mistress who, greedy eyed, had hovered near—

"What about me, General?"

His lips quirked. Stooping, he deliberately selected thirty bolívares and handed them to her. She flushed angrily, moved to throw the silver coins back into the chest, then, meeting his steely gaze, held them.

"Our Lord," he said, "was betrayed for thirty pieces of silver. The empty betrayal of a rat who has escaped is certainly worth no more. That is all you get, now or later. *Vaya!*"

After a venomous look, she went, still clutching her Judas fee.

"Find a priest," he then ordered.

A *PADRE* was brought. And while his own men and long eared town dwellers listened, the raider announced:

"Here is money for the poor. You are to give it to them. I am a stranger; I go soon, and I have not time to find the deserving. That is your work. Some day I shall return; and if I learn that the poor have not received this gift, that day will be a sad one for you. Now away with it! Men, escort the *padre* and his chest."

"Bless you, my son," murmured the ecclesiastic, accepting the governor's unwilled donation without hesitance.

He had it trundled away in a donkey cart. Before the rough riders left the town they received word that the iron box had been emptied into the eager hands of the destitute.

Next the victor sent men to open the filthy jail and release its inmates, most of whom, he realized, probably were not criminals but victims of official cruelty. These too he ordered to leave town at once, warning them that he was about to go and that their governor might soon reappear. Several begged permission to join his band, but he refused. Having declined to recruit his force with army monkeys, he certainly would not accept jailbirds.

His departure from the town took place almost as abruptly as his entrance; much too soon to please some of his followers who, with money in pockets, thirst in throats, girls in sight, and the town at their mercy, were inclined toward revelry. But their commander had foreseen this, as well as its almost inevitable outcome of brawling and probable bloody riot. Therefore he stopped licentiousness before it could start. He rode out. And his supporters, though muttering sulky retorts to the harsh orders of Santiago, trotted after him in good formation.

With them went all federal arms and ammunition. Men who had dared to assault the capital with poor firearms or none now rejoiced in possession of good rifles and full *bandoleras* of cartridges. As the town temptations faded behind and the vision of new conquests grew before them, the grouchiest recovered good humor. And when, some miles out, their *capitán* halted them and told a story, they laughed uproariously. It was a tale to tickle the most dour.

In bygone years Arnaldo had amused himself by learning telegraphy. And now, before leaving Calabozo, he had rattled out on the governor's private set the following message to Caracas:

President Gomez:

Arnaldo Chanaro, robbed and ruined by your thieving Governor Valera and your murderous Ministers Pecoro and Gual, has captured Calabozo, taken all arms, given away all federal moneys, driven Valera scuttling into a rathole. Send more soldiers at once to be disarmed in their turn. I need a few more new rifles.

—ARNALDO CHANARO.

The *llaneros*, hearing this, slapped their muscular thighs and laughed themselves into tears. And it is credibly rumored that soldierly President Gomez also grinned amid his anger at the taunting telegram; for he could appreciate audacity. But somewhat later came another report which, darting along the overland wire and spreading more slowly across the plains, made the faces of both the president and the rebel grow grim.

Governor Valera—so the distorted news ran—had been murdered in cold blood in his own house by the raider. He was unarmed, almost unclothed. He had been shot without chance of defense, thrown into a closet, found there later by townsmen.

The truth was that the governor, sneaking back from his hiding place, had encountered thieves plundering his bedroom. Knowing well what condign punishment awaited them if he continued to live, the looters shot him. Then they fled by way of the still open tunnel, shutting its secret door behind them as they went. The shots, muffled by thick walls, were unheard outside. When the body was eventually discovered, the girl who had been its mistress was questioned. And, actuated both by fear that the crime might be fastened on her and by hatred of the scornful Chanaro, she swore that Arnaldo had done the killing and silenced her by threats of death. Nobody could contradict her assertion. Thus the revolter who had as yet slain no man became a cold killer of officials, an unforgivable outlaw, in the eyes of his government.

Not that the state of Guárico cared. Indeed, its scattered ranchers laughed savagely when they heard the fate of their despot. So did many a townsman, and more than one ex-soldier of Calabozo. And when another governor, more decent, came to rule in his stead most of the

Guáricans gave Chanaro credit for the improvement.

The insurrectionist himself, however, and all his fellow mutineers raged when the rumor reached them. They knew not the why and wherefore of it all; they heard only the stark facts that Valera was dead and that every man of them was doomed to execution if caught. To them the thing was one more damnable injustice. Yet it had the effect of solidifying them into a fighting force more formidable. Henceforth every Chanaro rider would fight to the bitter end.

The man who had led them forth, intent only on his own vengeance, now took more sober thought when his first wrath cooled. He walked away alone, lay down on a hillock, looked fixedly up at his stars. Long he lay there, motionless. Then, as once before, he murmured—

"So be it."

CHAPTER IV

THE HAWK

YEARS passed.

Through those years the hard riding, hard shooting gang of Arnaldo Chanaro campaigned from east to west, from northern ocean to southern Orinoco, still preserving its individual identity. By the world of the *llanos*, however, and by the infuriated politicians of Caracas, it now was but hazily remembered as the rebellious band of a ruined rancher. Instead, it was the admirable or execrable outfit of El Halcón—The Hawk.

That name was, like most Spanish nicknames, very apt. It had been bestowed by some poetic and prophetic Calabozan before the new hawk had more than tried his wings. The sudden swoop of the bold raider, his swift stripping of the meat from his prey, his quick departure, all had inspired a local rhymester to compose a lyric which, after the governor's body was found, he gave out to his immediate world. It was eulogistic of the conqueror and scurrilous toward the dead official. But the latter fact made it all the more popular in Guárico, and it spread across the *llanos* with the speed of prairie fire. It swept to the Andes at the west and the delta at the east. More slowly it drifted southward, along the Orinoco, and even to the border of Brazil. Catchy, tuneful, semi-heroic, yet irresistibly ribald, it caught the ear and evoked guffaws of mirth. Consequently the exploit of the audacious Hawk was known in regions where his face had never been seen. And his following career more than justified the sobriquet.

As he had begun, so he continued. From nowhere at all he would hurl himself on a town where there was a federal force; capture it, seize its arms, give the governmental tax money or graft money to his men and to the local poor, and be gone. He mocked soldiers, he humiliated officials, he stung the prestige of the national government, until the name of El Halcón was feared and hated by every federal appointee north of the Orinoco—but beloved by the people. On undefended towns he made no attacks. He visited them, found jovial welcome, replenished food and horses, gave his men rest and relaxation, departed, none knew whither. He evaded all traps set for him by regional or national schemers, laughed at their abortive attempts to ensnare him. Through wet season and dry time he flitted far and wide, stooped, stripped, flew again unscathed; a true hawk, bold, yet wary and wily; often shot at, but never hit.

Unlike his first raid, however, his victories now were seldom bloodless. Federal garrisons were under strict orders to fight their fiercest against El Halcón or be executed as traitors. And, though more than one soldier probably shot high or wide while pretending deadly enmity, others fired to kill. Moreover, they did kill—and were killed. But the combats ended always in rebel victories. And when the conquered threw down their arms they suffered no ill treatment. Perhaps the widespread knowledge that

El Halcón was invariably magnanimous to the vanquished was a potent weapon in winning his battles.

His original force dwindled. Bullets, fevers, dysentery, other destroyers took their toll of the wild riders. Yet, paradoxically, his following increased. Adventurous horsemen from the plains, and some from the towns, came to join his band and would not be denied. Indeed, only his rigid resolve to keep his squadron small and mobile kept it from becoming unwieldy.

For every recruit whom he accepted, a score were uncompromisingly rejected. And every man admitted to the coveted fellowship had to pass such a searching inspection by the keen eyed veterans that his uttermost prowess and innermost thoughts were speedily known. The chance of a spy, a traitor, or an assassin to exist among such a chosen band was less than nil.

Inevitably the name and fame of El Halcón became quickly and enviously known by all revolutionists, full born or embryonic. And from these, by ways direct or devious, came many an offer to combine forces. Obviously a fighter of his caliber, to whom followers flocked unbidden, would be an invaluable addition to the strength of any other campaigner. But all such overtures met blunt refusal.

El Halcón would not fight for the advancement of any greedy schemer, nor for anything else but the joy of plaguing his sworn foes. Political office, wealth wrung from the people through onerous taxes, adulation of male and female sycophants—these might be lures to other disturbers of the peace, but not to him.

His avowed incentives to the continuance of his course were the rapid rides, the pounces on prey, the thrills of hot combat, the crackle of guns and the smell of powder; and, between whiles, the vast solitude of the plains, the bright gaze of the pure stars, the glorious risings of the sun, and, now and then, the lilting songs of bugles.

THOSE trumpets, picked up in conquered forts by raiders who fancied them as souvenirs, had become illogical but habitual articles of personal equipment in the Hawk's band. At the times when all orthodox bugles should speak—namely, during battle—these always were silent. No fighter in his command ever needed the voice of a horn to urge him on or to tell him what to do. It was after these combats, when the victors rode forth freshly armed and exalted with triumph, that the brazen tubes blared exuberant fanfares. And out in the wide wastes, far from the ears of all other men, one or another of them sang softly at nightfall, voicing some plaintive little composition which arose straight from a Spanish heart and sank deep into all others.

Not all the riders could play these trumpets, or even cared to try. Yet the number of good buglers was, in proportion to the size of the squadron, large; and several became adepts. The short, simple, serviceable instrument appealed to the irregular cavalry as no other could. And, having determined to master it, they commandeered expert tutelage. After one of their early raids they carried off with them a federal bugler; kept him prisoner for a week, and made him instruct them in the use of the military piece; then turned him loose with a donkey, a pocketful of money, and many jocular messages to any officers he might meet. To all of this their leader laughingly assented. In fact, though the men did not know it, he was the instigator of the whole affair. With ears weary of the grotesque noises produced by the amateurs, he had suggested to Santiago the means of turning the discords into music.

Since their instructor naturally knew best the military calls, he used them in his instruction. Consequently the practising pupils learned these unforgetably. Long after he was gone they still played them, amusing themselves and their comrades with impromptu interpolations which, suggesting flatulent ridicule of soldiery, evoked boisterous mirth. And

El Halcón, although not particularly diverted by such crude humor, encouraged the repetition of the signals. He foresaw that, if his fleet but small band should ever combat superior federal cavalry, bugles probably would be used by his enemies, and that the correct interpretation of those clarion orders would enable his own men to adapt themselves instantly to forthcoming change of action.

Such a contingency never came. Cavalry was sent forth from Caracas with explicit orders to find and exterminate the Halcón gang. But, thanks to tapping of the overland wire by The Hawk himself and to warnings from his friends in Guárico towns, the army men found only hardship and empty bafflement. Yet the yellow horns which had been adopted as playthings by the ex-cattlemen were, in future, to prove more powerful in strategy than their guns.

CHAPTER V

THE FATES STRIKE

NO MAN can be lucky forever. The fates, being females, are neeessarily capricious and malicious. They raise men, and women too, to heights only to cast them down. Then they sit back and watch with curious, cruel eyes to see what the fallen mortals will do. If those human atoms have the courage to get up and start anew, the inconstant directors of destiny may relent and help them. But if they lie and whine, or let themselves slip farther downhill, they will find themselves flung to a slimy bottom wherein they vanish.

Arnaldo Chanaro, bereft of wife, fortune, and home, had fought back as best he could. But he had neglected to grasp political power and misery stained money when they might be had for the taking. Now the whimsical old women on high stabbed him in the back.

Throughout his years of guerrilla warfare he had kept himself scrupulously clean, and his men as clean as might be; physically, mentally and morally. Yet now his squadron was smitten and nearly obliterated by a disease arising primarily from uncleanliness—smallpox. It was contracted in a village which hitherto had been reasonably healthful, and which, on the arrival of the rebels, had been apparently safe. But contagion was rapid and lethal. By the time the survivors buried all their dead, much less than half of the Chanaro gang remained. Among those who had disappeared underground was the best man in the outfit, aside from El Halcón himself—Santiago.

His loss was a grievous blow. Men who often had growled under his harsh discipline now rode away mournful and despondent. El Halcón himself felt much worse than they, though his brusk voice and stiff back gave no sign of it. They sensed his inner gloom, however. And when they made camp on the shore of a dismal creek at nightfall, the buglers remaining in the shrunken clan blew melancholy notes which drove the commander out on the plains, fists clenched, until he was beyond earshot of the dirge.

Then, as often before, he lay down on a gentle slope and fixed his eyes on the stars. They were misty and dim, like his mood and his future. But, hours later, they cleared and spoke to him. When he returned to his sadly diminished and even more sadly disheartened squadron—now not even a full troop—he walked with the old confident swagger, fronted the unborn morrow with the same high head and resolute jaw.

In those silent hours he had recognized the fact that his lucky star in Guárico was setting. He knew well that the virtually lawless *llanos* yielded homage only to the strong and successful. Now that he had been knocked nearly to his knees by a stroke of malign chance, other blows would land, heavy and hard, unless he dodged. He had not lived this long without learning when to sidestep. Now he was about to take not merely a step but a long jump—long even for his marvelous record. But, as usual, he knew where he was going.

So, when he strode into the light of his

few camp-fires and found all music stopped and all men steeped in glum sleep or listless depression, he snatched up a a bugle and blew a ragged but lively call. And when sentries and sleepers had snapped into full wakefulness he injected new vigor into their brains.

"Hear the new order, you sloths, you slugs, you decomposed scum of stagnant water!" he bullied, in the best manner of dead Santiago.

At sound of the familiar epithets the somber visages began to brighten.

"Sleep yourselves black in the face tonight, you crocodiles buried in slime!" he continued the beloved abuse. "But be up at the first light and ready to ride at sunrise, or find yourselves dragging from the tails of burros!"

"Where do we go?"

Somebody eagerly asked the usual question. He got Santiago's pet answer:

"To hell! What other place would let you in?"

Chuckles and good humored responses followed. Amid the rumble of voices El Halcón walked away to his little tent, grimly smiling. The prospect of action had revitalized them, and him as well. But he knew what they did not, that his parting promise had been no mere jest. He was about to lead them into the infernal up-Orinoco country, which most men in their senses shunned.

He also knew why he was taking them there. He never led his veterans anywhere without previous plan. But, as he and his men now sank into repose, the queer old women beyond the stars cackled over his decision. For not even the far sighted Hawk foresaw all he would find when he should reach his latest goal.

CHAPTER VI

SOUTH

IN THE years during which El Halcón swept the northern plains, another outlaw seized mastery of the southern jungles. He was called Culebrón.

The sobriquet, signifying serpentine cunning, was bestowed on him long before he became the tyrant of the Territory of Amazonas. Coming from somewhere down the great river, bringing a large stock of trade goods, he voyaged along the upper Orinoco and into Northern Brazil. He sold necessities to the dealers in balata rubber, skinning them so shrewdly on every sale that, though cursing, they gave him his nickname in left handed compliment. His real name soon was remembered but vaguely, if at all. For that matter, the one he had used probably was false, as were those of most other up-Orinoco men. That border region, virtually uncivilized, was the refuge of criminals from several countries.

Backed by a gang of these desperadoes, Culebrón suddenly attacked San Fernando, governmental town; shot down the governor and nearly all other men in the place; established garrisons at the cataracts a hundred miles downstream, and thenceforth held the rich territory in brutal thrall. He bled the rubber gatherers, figuratively and literally. Mad with power, he caused many of them to be beheaded with machetes when their tributes fell off, or when they sought to escape. The blocks of balata extorted from these unfortunates were shipped into Brazil and down to Manaos, metropolis of the middle Amazon. Manaos sent back gold, steel, lead—money and guns and bullets. With these monetary profits and sinews of war, and an unfailing supply of merciless men to wield the weapons, the ex-trader waxed even more forceful, and more lustful. Blood lust, money lust, woman lust grew more insatiable, drove him to excesses more hideous.

The tales of his atrocities floated far; down the Orinoco, out to the long coast, up into the mountains where stood Caracas. The Caracas government fumed, schemed, but found itself impotent. Between the capital city and the outlaws' town lay five hundred miles of virtually roadless land and rock torn water; the hinterland was held by ruffians numerous and well armed; and if a federal army ever

should succeed in penetrating to the stronghold of Culebrón, he and his men had only to retreat across the easily accessible Brazilian border to safety, then return and resume operations whenever the soldiers departed. Wherefore the government, after counting costs and realizing the uselessness of so much expenditure and endeavor, shrugged and did nothing.

To all revolutionists likewise came the same tales. Some swore enviously at thought of the power and wealth accruing to the southern usurper. But none felt moved to join him. Their minds all were fixed on the presidential chair in the north. The thought of existence in the malarial settlement of San Fernando was anything but tempting. Moreover, the savagery of the Amazonas despot disgusted men with brains enough to aspire to rule the country. So, like the politicians whom they hoped to overthrow, they shrugged and attended to men and matters closer to their own interests.

Of all these, the quixotic Hawk of Guárico felt the greatest repugnance toward the greedy, venomous Snake of Amazonas. But now, after that period of contemplation on the gloomy plains, he was going to Culebrón.

THE NEW sun found him and his diminished band of horsemen in their saddles. As the brilliant light smote them he confronted them gravely and spoke with cool deliberation.

"*Hombres*, have I ever made you a promise that I have not kept?"

"No!" came quick response.

"*Bien*. Last night I promised you that we should go to hell. I meant it. I am going into a hell where I never thought to go. Perhaps I shall come back, perhaps not. Any man who does not care to go to hell with me can hold his horse now. Any man who starts with me need never say that he was not given fair warning, nor try to turn back afterward. I give you one minute to think."

With that he wheeled his mount and sat with his back to them. When he judged that a full minute had elapsed he trotted southward, without a look behind. Every other horse followed. Not one rider checked his steed or turned aside.

For days thereafter they plodded steadily into the south. They reached the Orinoco at its point of junction with the Rio Apure, up which, when water is high enough, ply occasional small steamers from far down the master river. The flood season now was well past, the streams all sunken within their usual banks, the level lowering daily. From some hut dwellers the Hawk learned that the government vessel *Arauca* was due soon, upbound on her last trip of the season. Thereupon he posted his most farsighted men to watch down the broad waterway, and commanded the rest:

"Clean up! Clean horses, weapons, clothes. Then do whatever you like, except ride off or play the bugles. When you hear the call of assembly, gather at once."

Then, in his tent, he unpacked a canvas bag. And on convenient bushes outside he laid several pieces of cloth, thoroughly dampened, to dry anew, minus wrinkles. The sight of those articles much astonished his subordinates. They comprised an army officer's uniform and a national flag.

The next day the *Arauca* hove in sight, a black spot crawling up the yellow expanse of the Orinoco, surmounted by a leaning plume of smoke. Thereupon a bugle blew and men converged swiftly to hear queer orders and, unquestioning, obey. By the time the slow steamer reached the Apure mouth a trap was set and baited.

Three bugles, blowing in unison, hurled imperious notes far across the water. From a tall pole atop a bare hummock floated the seven starred colors of Venezuela: gold, blue, crimson, in broad stripes held almost straight by vigorous breeze. Below it sat mounted horsemen, at whose head was a uniformed officer.

For a few minutes the *Arauca* plowed

onward. On board, her captain was studying the group through a glass, growling to himself, debating what to do. Old in the river run, he was wary of revolutionists. The horsemen yonder were not in uniform, wearing only typical plains clothes. However, that was nothing unusual in Orinoco soldiery. Their leader was obviously a federal officer, and his trumpeted command to halt was unavoidably audible and backed by the flag. Without question he had been out hunting bandits and now wanted transportation back to the capital of Apure. If ignored, he would make things hot for the ignorer; army officers always did. So, though heartily cursing *soldados* too lazy to ride their horses home, the riverman yelled an order.

THE WHISTLE bellowed response to the bugles. The pilot sought a berth alongshore. The steamer slowed, swerved, stopped. Deckhands dragged out a gangway. By the time it was in position the horsemen had trotted to the boarding spot.

"It took you long enough to wake up," called their officer, with the insolence expected of him. "Now show some life, if you have any, and get us aboard *muy pronto!*"

"What do you expect?" roared the irate captain. "Do you think this is a canoe, to stop anywhere?"

"Oh, shut up, thickhead," casually retorted the army man. "Get aboard, *hombres*. But go slow! One at a time! That gangway is probably rotten, like everything else on this louse nest."

The bandit chasers chuckled. The captain muttered new maledictions. The army officer sat arrogantly indifferent, though keenly attentive to the boarding of his subordinates. Those men went up the plank with equal wariness, watching their footing, the crew, and the few passengers all at once, yet touching no weapons. On all beholders swiftly grew certitude that these hard eyed *soldados* were veteran campaigners and exceedingly bad risks. In fact, the captain experienced a sudden sinking at the stomach, wondering whether he had been tricked; for he never had seen these faces on the Apure or the Orinoco. But another look at the supercilious officer, correct in every detail of attire and attitude, revived his confidence.

That officer came aboard last, having seen every man and horse safe across the bending bridge. He handed the reins of his own steed to a ready soldier, climbed the narrow companionway, strode to the captain, who, on the foredeck, scowled down at the deckhands struggling to shove the gangway inboard.

"Thanks," he dryly acknowledged. "Now go to Atures."

"Atures!" echoed the astonished riverman. "You mean Apure, Colonel."

"No. Atures."

"Atures? *Válgame Dios!* You are loco, or I am! Atures is two hundred miles farther up the Orinoco! It is the place of the hellish rapids! It is the land of the cutthroats of Culebrón! And the river from here to there is full of rocks! No steamer ever goes to Atures!"

"This one will," smiled Chanaro.

His sneering air was gone; but his eyes were steely, and his right hand rested lazily on the butt of his belt gun.

"Perhaps you have made an error, Captain," he continued. "Did you think we were federals returning to garrison? Yes? Well, that is not quite correct. I am El Halcón."

The swarthy captain stood paralyzed. Eyes and mouth gaped.

"And have you ever heard what happened to Governor Valera, at Calabozo, in Guárico?" purred the raider. "He angered me, and later he was found extremely dead. As I was saying, I now wish to go to Atures."

The other's complexion turned pale green. His mouth closed, reopened, closed again. Suddenly it stretched in a grin, and his color became normal.

"You devil!" he chortled. "*Pues*, to Atures we go, unless we sink on the way.

I warn you again that the road is dangerous, and I do not know it well. But I have no desire to lose my ship, and if it can go there it will."

"*Bueno! Vamonos!*"

So they went. On a government steamer, under the national flag, with food served at its best and drinks free at the bar and a phonograph playing in the saloon, the outlaws of The Hawk forged up against the treacherous Orinoco in luxurious ease and jollity, avoiding nearly seventy leagues of difficult land travel which grew rougher with every league. To the worried captain and the nerve wracked pilot, striving by day and night to evade the multitudinous perils of little known navigation, the journey was no picnic. But the hilarious horsemen, ignorant of river hazards and long heedless of death, could hardly be expected to care for the anxieties on the bridge. While the carefree journey lasted they made the most of it. And one of them, jocose with liquor and temporarily overfamiliar toward The Hawk he had followed so long, bawled before all his mates—

"*Capitán*, if this is the road to hell why didn't we ride it sooner?"

To which, with a slight smile, he countered:

"The start to hell is always easy. Wait and see what you find at the end of the road!"

CHAPTER VII

INVASION

ATURES, mosquito infested hamlet controlling the overland road which all mid-Orinoco voyagers must travel in order to pass the long rapids, drowsed in lethargic siesta.

Midway between the lower and upper ports, at each of which was a watchful outpost, the village was almost immune from attack without warning. Moreover, in the years since Culebrón had grasped control of Amazonas it had never been attacked, and there was no indication that it would be. The distant and inactive national government had never sent troops. Nobody else had troops to send. Therefore the swaggering toughs who formed its garrison had nothing worse to fear than the snooping visit of some upriver inspector. One such had come and gone a week past, and there was no likelihood of another for a month. So, from commandant to perfunctory sentry, every one was blank brained from habit of afternoon dormancy.

All at once, however, the drooping sentry snapped awake—too late. A grim jawed stranger ten feet off, with big bored rifle centered on the guardian's abdomen, coolly bade—

"Drop your gun!"

After one astounded look into the ruthless eyes of the apparition, the Culebrón henchman let his weapon fall. Glancing around in vain search for a line of retreat, he found three score other swarthy invaders scattered at apparent haphazard among the straggling clay houses and, standing at his back, a keen faced white man with a long revolver in each loose hanging hand.

"This," quietly questioned the evident leader, "is the house of your commander?"

His head tilted sidewise toward the squatty headquarters which the captive had been too carelessly guarding. The latter sullenly nodded.

"The door is barred, no doubt?"

"*Sí.*"

"Go and have it opened. When it opens, go in. I walk behind you. Make one false move and your bowels will be blown out. Start!"

The disarmed watchman shuffled to the shut door. On it he knocked loudly. Long seconds passed. Then a bar slid, the door swung, a scowling mestizo face looked out —and froze in shocked fear. One of the stranger's guns, leveled above a shoulder of the guard, centered on the servant's left eye.

"Announce Culebrón, *hombre!*" whispered the captor. "And you, *mozo*, be dumb!"

"*Capitán!*" obediently bawled the

sentry. "The general, Culebrón, is here!"

Sudden commotion in a room at the right acknowledged receipt of the false news. The half clad commandant, dismayed by the sudden arrival of his dreaded ruler, was springing to his clothes.

A hard muzzle jabbed the sentry's spine. He swung forward, shoved open the bedroom door, which stood ajar. The servant, still petrified, watched the pair go.

INSIDE the room, El Halcón grinned tightly at a gross, sweaty man who, with trousers half on, stood grotesquely defenseless. Over the back of a near chair was looped a full cartridge belt with holstered revolver; but the trapped owner had no chance to seize the weapon. His hands were gripped on the garment, his astounded eyes fixed on the intruder whose spare gun accurately menaced his paunch.

"Hop outside, toad," invited the derisive newcomer. "Keep your hands exactly where they are as you go."

"Who in hell are you?" rasped the prisoner.

"The devil, of course. *Vaya!*"

The commandant cast a glance toward his belt, so near, yet so far. But he made no motion to snatch it. The icy eyes of the two gun man were eloquent of sudden death. Wherefore, with one leg clothed and the other bare, and both fists still clutched on the waistband of his dragging garment, he hitched himself ignominiously outward. Behind him went the sentry, followed by El Halcón.

The rifleman outside, now holding the servant cowed, snickered at the appearance of the crestfallen chief, and laughed aloud as that worthy, assailed by mosquitoes, rammed his bare leg into protective cloth. El Halcón chuckled. Then, holding the three captives close herded, he pleasantly instructed:

"Look about, little man. Observe that every house where your tender goslings lie dreaming is covered by two of my fellow devils. Now when your birdlets come out quacking, tell them to surrender at once. Otherwise the vultures will feed fat."

With that he fired a shot in the air.

Instantly a wave of fierce yells swept the somnolent town. Rifles banged in irregular, individual fire. Pandemonium followed.

Doors flew open. Greasy faced men clad in shirts or in nothing at all sprang out, bearing guns unaimed, confusedly seeking the cause of the disturbance. Then they halted short, finding themselves covered by tensely ready raiders. Shocked dumb and numb, they stood in all sorts of postures, gaping, unnerved. Some threw swift glances to right and left, perceiving that the town was held by a force outnumbering their own. Others saw only the men and guns threatening their own scared brains and bodies.

Then came the harsh voice of their own commandant, shouting:

"Throw down your guns! We are captured!"

After a long second of hesitance, guns began to drop. Not all of them, however, fell in obedience to the command. Two or three malefactors who long had dreaded capture more than death instinctively jerked their muzzles toward the nearest strangers and fired. But, compared to the swiftly striking Hawk men, they were slow. Bullets struck them as their own fingers pressed triggers. So they went down with their weapons. Willingly or otherwise, the order to disarm was thus fulfilled.

EMPTY handed, the chagrined toughs were herded together and marched to the tall marauder who, with one revolver now sheathed and the other resting loose but ready in the crook of an elbow, regarded them with calm contempt. At his bidding a score of his dismounted cavalry trudged to the woods behind the hamlet, to return on horses. With them sheepishly walked the dozen miscreants who had formed the outpost at Zamuro, lower

port of the rapids, and who, finding themselves suddenly surrounded by riders who had stealthily approached from somewhere downriver, had yielded their arms without a shot.

Now the mounted men trotted away along the cart road leading to Salvajito, upper port, to overpower the squad of Culebrón servitors stationed there. The Hawk again contemplated his shifty eyed catch, and his nose wrinkled. He knew them to be—as all men of Culebrón were—criminals who had taken to service under the merciless southern Snake because they could not exist otherwise; human animals, brutal toward victims, braggart toward one another, but bereft of courage when conquered. Contrasted with them, the conscripted soldiers of the northern plains, at whom he had laughed, were paragons of manliness. At least, so he felt. And, to satisfy himself that the feeling was correct, he put it to test.

"I am going," he announced, "to visit your commander, Culebrón. He does not expect me. But I am impatient to meet him. So, rather than wait here while you send word that I am on my way, I have gathered you in. I dare say Culebrón will be much pleased when he hears how easily you were persuaded to give me free passage."

Paling cheeks, tightening lips, sidewise glances toward the woods all testified that the captured men had no desire to be within reach of their atrocious master when he learned that they had failed him. The Atures commandant, in fact, gulped as if smitten by nausea.

"I shall want men to guide me on to San Fernando," added their tormentor. "But if they would prefer to stop outside that town and then go elsewhere at once, without meeting Culebrón, it can be arranged. As soon as I arrive there my guides are free to go their own ways. More than that, I shall give them back their guns. Any men who desire the job can step forward—one step, no more."

Within one second every captive moved toward him.

Not one of them hesitated. Not one of them, cornered and defenseless, had the least iota of loyalty toward the tyrant, a hundred miles south, who fed and clothed and armed him. Not one of them stood his ground and gave his captor the defiant gaze which, under similar circumstances, would have been altogether natural to any follower of The Hawk.

That Hawk looked at them with redoubled repugnance, yet with a thin smile of surety. He knew now, beyond question, what sort of men constituted the power of Culebrón.

"Bring the rest of the horses!" he snapped to his new second in command, one Pascual. "Send some of the men to search the houses and take all weapons, ammunition, and food. These animals shall be our laborers, all of them. *Vaya!*"

"*Sí, capitán,*" grinned Pascual. "So it shall be."

And so it was.

CHAPTER VIII

MID-RIVER

CRAWLING up adverse currents, a flotilla of *pirāguas* and dugout canoes neared San Fernando, lair of Culebrón.

The motive power was the sullen exgarrison of Atures, reinforced by that of Maipures, the only other settlement below the bandit stronghold. Shoving mechanically with long poles, they forced the boats on along the rocky Orinoco, tight mouthed, but smarting with rancor toward the grinning plainsmen who guarded and gibed at them. And, though they knew themselves impotent to retaliate, they consoled themselves with visions of the fate awaiting the jeering jesters. Culebrón would fix these cocksure idiots!

Culebrón, with at least five men to every one of the Northerners and with almost unlimited cartridges, would make a bloody hash of the asinine assailants *pronto*. And those who died suddenly would be lucky. As the poles swung, the polers vengefully pictured the cutting up

of the captured survivors of the foolhardy assault. They themselves would not be there to witness it; else they probably would meet the same doom. Savage Culebrón would consider them traitors for bringing enemies here, and would brook no excuse of compulsion. No, they emphatically would not be within his reach when the attack was over, nor even when it started. But they could enjoy the butchery all the better without lingering to see it. They had seen prisoners suffer often enough—in fact, had themselves destroyed such unfortunates frequently enough—to know what would be done. And the fact that they would then be well downstream, on their way to recover their guns and seize the horses of their present masters and scatter to new scenes of crime, would make their revenge completely satisfactory.

The horses of the Guáricans had, perforce, been left at Atures; for it had been impossible to bring them farther. A half dozen men had, much against their wills, remained with them. Those few guards were heavily armed. The desperadoes who now labored as boatmen would return weaponless. But their rifles and machetes were awaiting them in the locked headquarters, which they could quickly break open. And, with these in hand, they could make short work of the horse protectors. Their commandant, sweating at a pole like the rest, had secretly passed the word that a few boxes of cartridges, undiscovered by the captors, remained buried in the earth floor of his house. Thus the killing of the watchmen would be easy.

THE SCHEMERS failed to guess that the horses would not be there on their return; that the leader of the raiders had given the guards a quiet order to remove the beasts to an excellent stretch of pasture some miles downstream, and inland, discovered in the course of the ride from the spot of steamer debarkation to Zamuro. That command now was executed, and the pole pushers were destined to ride only the "poor man's donkey", as Orinoco dwellers derisively call the dugout canoe.

Now, however, their release was almost at hand. In the river arose two precipitous isles of stone, crowned by trees, known locally as Los Castillitos—the Little Castles. Only a few miles beyond these was the junction of the rivers Orinoco and Atabapo; and a league up the latter stream stood the murderers' roost which, once given a saintly name by missionaries, now long vanished, still retained it, San Fernando. There the quixotic invader must do his futile fighting. And here at the Castles the conscripted boatmen meant to quit and flee, with full consent of their masters.

On the way up, the captured commandant and The Hawk had agreed on this point of severance. The former had also drawn an accurate map of the immediate environs of the outlaw capital and marked the best spot for landing unperceived. Whether his motive in doing so was fear of the dangerous jawed Northerner or rankling memories of bygone indignities by Culebrón, whom he now was about to abandon forever, was problematical; but his work was manifestly honest. Therefore, as the steep isles reared themselves and he turned his gaze expectantly toward the watchful Chanaro, the latter nodded and beckoned.

"Now we part," said El Halcón, when the sweat drenched prisoner stood before him. "When we are landed on the sand there at the base of the larger island, you and your men may go. Make sure that you keep going!"

"With pleasure," acquiesced the other.

"And when you are gone, try to keep yourself clean and fit," coolly advised the hard muscled rider. "Already you look less like a toad and more like a man. The work you've done in the last few days has shrunk your rummy belly by half. Get yourself back into condition and you may be human again. And cut loose from this mess of scum you've been bossing. They're nothing but filth. You have some brains. Use them for your own good!

But enough of that. Put us ashore, then get out on the *piraguas*. We shall keep the canoes."

"*Muy bien.*"

The bloated fellow resumed work, pushing with fresh energy, scowling with effort only half physical. The contemptuous counsel of the Guárican stuck in his mind, then and later. And afterward, unknown to the sarcastic adviser, he followed it. He cleaned himself of garrison fat and foulness, went west, made good as a Colombian rancher. Meanwhile the human scum which he had controlled at Atures sank into abysmal obliteration.

AT PRESENT, however, he plied his pole until the sandy stretch laid bare by receding waters was reached. And when the adventurers were landed he and his evil eyed subordinates shoved off promptly in the clumsy *piraguas* assigned to them, giving no *adios*. Jammed with human shapes, the heavy hulls slid away down the river, making all the distance they could before the impending sunset should force them to make camp. On the sands, the men left to destruction by the Snake of Amazonas made ribald gestures, then pulled up the dugouts and prepared for the night.

Good climbers ascended the rocky sides of the isle, scouted the top, looked long upstream, returned and reported. Then all bathed, made a meal, picked places for sleep against the base of the cliff. But none slept yet. Although the scouts had discerned no danger beyond, although no enemy could detect or suspect their presence there, they were uneasy. Accustomed to vast spaces of open land, to horses, to unimpeded movement, they felt imprisoned in the circumscribed quarters amid the river.

As the darkness spread, whisperings and mutterings increased. At length three men approached El Halcón, who sat with his back against the stone and eyes absently fixed on the sullen waters.

"Capitán," quietly said the spokesman, "we understand that tomorrow we attack another place. You know us; none will hang back. But we are wondering what we are to do, and why we are to do it. We have come far. We are willing to go much farther. But this is different from what we have done before. We should like to know what comes."

The Hawk arose, dark against the gray stone. His answer was neither angry nor evasive.

"A fight comes, *hombres*. You know that. And the reason for it is this:

"We have enjoyed ourselves in Guárico fighting federals. It has been play. Fortune has favored us. But fortune is not forever constant. Recently it turned against us. Now we have stopped playing.

"We have come south to find new strength. We must have it, and our *llanos* now are not the place to find it. We are badly weakened. The Guárico towns are more strongly garrisoned than ever. The men who would have joined us when we were strong will side with the federals now that they are stronger. Town people who have taken our money would as willingly take federal money for our heads. Revolutionists who once vied to join us would treat us like slinking dogs if we should go to them. We will not bow our necks to any of them! We are hawks, not tame fowls of the dungheap!"

"*Sssssí!*" came a combined hiss of approval.

"And now we pounce on a nest of snakes. The snakes of Culebrón are just beyond here. They have rattles and fangs—yes, and death for the clumsy! But they also have much steel and lead and gold. We are going to take all that. We are going to show that what the torpid government, with all its power, could not do, a little flock of fearless hawks can do. Or we will end our career there. If we live we shall be greater heroes than ever before, and, more to the point, much richer. If we die, it will not be with our backs to a fort wall and ass headed federals braying over our bodies. We live or we die as we should! We make monkeys of the

government once more, or we fall fighting.

"That's all. That's why we are here. We shall leave here when the stars tell me it is time to go. Until then, sleep. After that you will get your orders."

"*Bueno!*"

The trio faded. Mutterings crept along the edge of rock and sand, succeded by reckless chuckles. Thereafter came silence, disturbed only by scattered snores of sleeping men, gurgles from the black water flowing around them, distant animal noises from the mainland.

El Halcón sat awhile longer, looking, listening, thinking. Then, gazing aloft, he fixed the positions of the stars, stamped on his mind their stations three hours before dawn, and lay down, to fall swiftly asleep. Long trained to arousing himself at predetermined times, he knew he would awake at that hour as surely as if shaken by a sentry.

So, marooned in mid-river, all rested tranquilly as only old campaigners can. And while they lay oblivious, the treacherous Orinoco played one of the many malignant tricks of which it is always capable.

By every law of probability it should have sunk several more inches during the night. The plainsmen, grown accustomed to this steady recession since they had become water riders, had provided for it by leaving their most heavily laden boats only lightly stranded. Now, strengthened by some hard rain far upstream, the river imperceptibly rose nearly a foot, floated a number of the canoes free, bore them away. Among the vanishing shells was the one in which rested the ammunition.

CHAPTER IX

DETERMINATION

"*SANTO Dios, ten misericordia!* Just God, have mercy!"

El Halcón, electric torch in hand, stood at the water's edge, staring at the vacancy where had lain his vital cartridges. In the faint reflection of the light his face showed sickly white.

Behind him, all his men still slept. Before him stretched the gloomy river, wrecker of hopes, destroyer of countless lives, road to defeat, Any attempt to pursue his lost munitions down it now would be not only futile but suicidal. The low, dark dugout could never be discerned on that nightshrouded waste; and the inexpert paddlers of the searching canoes would inevitably hit unperceived rocks. How long the load of bullets had been gone he could not know, nor whither it had been carried by shifting currents. And daylight was yet three hours away.

When that light should come, however, it would be possible for him to retreat unmolested. The cutthroats of San Fernando still were unaware of his proximity. His band could go back down the river, beaten by circumstance, disheartened, to meet new disasters.

"No!" he grated.

Moving along the sand, he looked at his unconscious followers. Each lay with his repeating rifle close beside him. Each rifle was, he knew, fully loaded. No man of his force ever slept with his gun empty. Thus every one of them now possessed thirteen rounds. Many also wore revolvers. Moreover, all of them had limitless bravery. But against enemies who far outnumbered them, who could be expected to defend their own stronghold with the ferocity of cornered rats—

A yellow gleam caught his eye. It came from the bell of a bugle, newly scoured with river sand, lying close beside the rifle of its owner. His slow steps stopped. For minutes he stood with his light concentrated on that trumpet. Then he whirled, strode to Pascual, touched his shoulder. The hairy lieutenant instantly sprang awake.

"Get the men up," came calm instruction. "Let us eat and go. By the way, our reserve cartridges all are gone. The river stole them."

"What!"

Pascual looked as if suddenly kicked in the stomach.

"*Cristo!* What shall we do?" he groaned.

"Attack with what we have, Pascual."

Dumb, Pascual stared.

"I told you all that our voyage led to hell," grimly reminded El Halcón. "This is the hell of it."

CHAPTER X

BUGLES

SAN FERNANDO awoke, briskly or sluggishly, to another day.

Those who responded at once to the summons of the dawn were comparatively few; the few who had not indulged in some form of debauchery in the course of the bygone night. Many of its denizens, male or female, dragged themselves by degrees from drunken or debilitated torpor, to sit up dully and curse the necessity for rising or to flop over and drowse again. Some, too sodden to regain consciousness yet awhile, continued to snore. Within an hour, in the ordinary course of events, all would be up and going through the monotonous motions of morning existence. But that time was not now.

The first to exhibit alertness was a sentinel who climbed to one of the twin towers of the priestless church and sent a sweeping survey abroad. From its height above the one story houses composing the town, this squat elevation commanded the usual approaches—the black River Atabapo, a pistol shot away, and the short road leading off through the adjacent woods to the Orinoco, which flowed behind the settlement. As usual at this lifeless hour, the lookout found nothing new on water or land. Wherefore he stood with outward semblance of vigilance, but with attention covertly fixed on the long house across the plaza, wherein dwelt Culebrón. Soon somebody therein would open door or window long enough to make sure that he was at his post. After that he could virtually doze on his feet until relieved.

As he awaited the customary peering from his master's headquarters he inwardly sneered at that deadly boss. He knew, as did all others here, that the bloody handed brute lived in constant fear of assassination. The fear was not baseless. Many a man, and woman too, here and elsewhere, would be only too glad to see their oppressor writhing in agonies of death. The sentinel himself, in fact, would have no objection to witnessing such a sight if he could find any one else who would feed him thereafter. In all this place—yes, in all the world—Culebrón had only one stanch friend, one Emilio Paez, whom the ex-trader had saved from starvation some years back, and who had the incomprehensible idea that his life belonged to his savior. In consequence of this queer feeling and of his total fearlessness, the fellow was an inseparable and incorruptible bodyguard of the jungle king. Nobody else, despite the sycophantic subservience due a ruthless despot, harbored for him any feelings but fear and covert hate.

Soon a door opened, and the expected face appeared, the stolid but sharp eyed visage of Emilio. It glanced to right and left in habitual search for any shape lurking near with a gun, looked up at the watcher, yawned, faded back into the dark interior. The man in the tower sneered again. Culebrón, for all his swashbuckling readiness to pistol defenseless captives in sight of all his subjects, dared not show his own face in the morning until he knew that no armed enemy awaited him. Perhaps the ghosts of his victims flocked on him in the night, vampire-like, to sap his courage. At any rate, he was no hero to the fellow up in the church, who had to rise before cock-crow and stand amid bat droppings to reassure him.

Now other doors swung open in random sequence. Half dressed men emerged, inhaled the cool air, yelled coarse jokes at one another, lounged against their walls while their frowzy females, inside, prepared breakfast. A few of the women, too, came out, blinking, yawning, scratching heads and other parts, to stand in their dingy nightgowns and repay ribald male jests with wit twice as lewd. Children,

naked as at birth, frolicked at thresholds until one of them dragged out a sick kitten and began torturing it; then, with squeals of delight, they flocked together to make it scream the louder, while their unwed creators laughed. Noisy, noisome, another typical San Fernando day now was well under way.

Suddenly the customary sounds ceased. Motions stopped. Muscles stiffened. Tongues went dry. Blood froze. Across the medley of voices had cut a new note, loud, long dreaded, appalling—the strident command of a military bugle to attack.

The lookout wheeled in fright. Out in the road of approach from the Orinoco, clear and cleancut in the bright sun, stood a uniformed officer of the federal army. At the edge of the woods on either side of him, strung along in skirmish line, were visible uniformed but tense soldiers, rifles ready. The officer, listening for something, was motioning them back.

Another bugle sounded; another, another, in varying calls from various spots among the trees. Belatedly a fifth blared from farther back, angry, authoritative, demanding delay while tardy troops took position. At that the officer stamped a foot, evidently chagrined. But, obedient to the order, he again waved restraining hands toward the eager riflemen.

"*Diablo!*" yelled the sentinel, his voice a scream of fear. "The army is on us! We are surrounded! To arms, *hombres*, to arms! Oh *Dios*, we are trapped!"

JERKING up his rifle, he fired at the officer. The bullet flew wild. The army man, with derisive grin splitting his leathery face, deliberately drew a revolver and loosed a retaliating shot. The ball thumped into the roof of the tower. The sentry dodged. The officer grinned more widely and sheathed his weapon with the contemptuous assurance of a man certain of his prey.

At that exchange of bullets the men among the trees surged forward. They came widely spaced, as first attackers should. Their rifles roared in wanton shots. Their voices roared louder, in deep throated yell:

"*Viva Gomez! Culebrón abajo!*"*

Behind them the bugles still conflicted. Four ordered—

"Charge!"

One countermanded—

"Cease firing!"

The unseen main body of assailants was obviously confused. The sentinel did not wait for it to act in unison.

He leaped from the low tower, fell asprawl, scrambled to his feet, fled toward the river Atabapo. He did not even pause to pick up his rifle. Face ghastly with fear, he sprinted to gain a canoe and escape.

All eyes were on him as he leaped for life. All minds raced riverward with him. Many bodies instantly followed. With his yell still in their shocked brains, the shots and shouts of the federals advancing, the frightful bugles smiting their inmost fears, the refugees from governmental retribution sprang to unreasoning, panicky flight. Some dived into their houses for their guns. Many more did not. Gulping, gasping, they dashed toward the anchorage.

Reaching it, they fought like rats for the boats lying there. Knives, fists, foul kicks laid men low on the shore or toppled them into the water to drown. Boats shoved off and departed in frenzy. Men left without other means of escape plunged into the river and tried to swim to the other side. Some reached it. More sank, to be eaten later by crocodiles.

The attackers, closing into the few short streets and swiftly converging into the plaza, found few defenders. These, shooting from corners, were shot down in their turns. The town was captured with the loss of few lives. Excepting the lives of women and children, few remained to be taken.

From one of those children, abandoned in a street while his parents scurried to refuge, the tall federal officer learned what he most wished to know. Striding

* "Long live Gomez! Down with Culebrón!"

toward the plaza with a revolver in each hand, he found a crippled boy cowering outside a barred door. Forthwith he greeted:

"Good morning, son! Cheer up! You're safe. We don't kill young fellows like you. Just show me where Culebrón lives. Quick!"

"*Sí, señor!*" came instant assent. "The plaza! Take me! Will you kill the dirty pig?"

"Perhaps. Why?"

"He kicked me once. *Vamos, pronto!* He might get away!"

They went, hand in hand, the child hopping eagerly on a withered leg. In the plaza the little fellow pointed.

"There! That long house! Take the west end! And if you catch him alive let me see you torture him!"

The uniformed man gave him one quick stare, then snapped commands. The skirmishers dashed to surround the long house. The great body of federal troops which had been behind them in the woods still remained inexplicably absent. Bugles continued to blow at intervals, but no more soldiers arrived.

At the west end, as the vengeful boy had directed, the bulk of the thin line of assailants concentrated. And at a heavy door which that same betrayer designated, the officer rapped with a gun butt.

"Culebrón! Surrender!" he shouted.

FOR ANSWER, a bullet thudded against the inner side of the barrier. But for the thickness of the hard tropic wood, the missile would have come through to pierce his torso.

He shrugged and turned to his men.

"The Snake is in his hole," he called. "Watch all exits. And break in here!"

After brief delay, a battering ram was brought. It was a thirty foot dugout canoe, found in the back yard of some departed owner who had chosen not to leave it at the waterside as easy prey to thieves. Cut from wood nearly as strong as steel, it was almost as heavy. But, borne by a score of strong men, it was handled with ease.

Crash! The blunt prow of the ponderous weapon, impelled by more than a ton of human brawn and by measureless vigor, smote the door. The inner bars, never constructed to withstand so terrific a shock, snapped like toothpicks. The door itself fell from its hinges. Over it leaped El Halcón—only to trip and fall headlong.

That stumble saved him. From a doorway ahead stabbed fire. A man just behind the fallen leader toppled to lie beside him. But others, bounding in after, loosed a horizontal hail of lead along the corridor, following it up with a furious charge.

The doorway spat no more bullets. Instead, the door slammed shut. But it was far less solid that the outer barrier. Under the combined impact of a dozen hurtling bodies it crumpled inward. Through the forced opening swarmed the battle mad plainsmen.

The Hawk, regaining his feet and his dropped revolvers, swooped after them. Beyond the door he found an inferno of fight.

Cornered in a small, dim room, two half-seen men fired at their foes. The latter, impeded by their own numbers in the constricted space, shot and struck with barrels and butts. Explosions, yells, blows blended in a lurid hell of flame and noise.

Then it ended. The foremost man of the two collapsed to the floor. The one behind him dropped his revolver and threw up his hands.

"I yield!" he howled. "I surrender!"

The Hawk, just pressing trigger, twitched his revolver up in the nick of time. The heavy ball struck the wall an inch above the head of the man who had quit.

"Cease firing!" he shouted. "Hold, all!"

One more shot spat; a shot which, like his own, could not be stopped but was deflected. Then, panting, hot faced, still nerved to strike like thunderbolts, the raiders stood poised. Slowly they relaxed. Victory was theirs; complete

victory, won with almost the last bullet in their guns.

Thus El Halcón, with hardly fifty valiant fighters and insufficient ammunition, drove nearly three hundred well armed murderers in mad flight, captured the capital of Amazonas, and utterly defeated the notorious Culebrón. What the entire federal army of Venezuela had not even dared attempt to do by bullets, he had accomplished by bravery, bluff, and bugles.

CHAPTER XI

NEMESIS

THE DIM room reeked of powder gas. With only a fleeting glance at the cornered master of Amazonas, The Hawk looked aside and down, then commanded—

"Open a window!"

Somebody flung wide a thick shutter. Light darted in, followed by fresh air. The Hawk sent swift survey along the floor. Four men lay there, three temporarily crippled by bullet wounds, one dying. The last was the battler who, shielding Culebrón with his own body, had fought to his doom—Emilio Paez.

Shot through the right arm while in the doorway, rifle knocked from his grasp, he had retreated to the corner and there resumed firing with a revolver in his left hand. Now, mortally stricken, he lay with teeth clenched, bloody spume on his lips, eyes dulling, but spirit unbroken.

The Hawk stooped, pulled the hand gun from the feeble fingers still clutching it and opened it. Every shell in it was empty.

"*Hombre*, you are a brave man," he said soberly. "If I can save your life I will!"

A faint grimace passed over the reddened lips. Through the set teeth came gasping refusal:

"No. I go—with my general—to the end. And—"

The brown eyes rolled up to the unwounded craven who had thrown down his half emptied weapon.

"My—general," labored the fading voice, "we—are—lost!"

A gurgle, a rattle, a quiver, and Emilio Paez died.

"*Cra!*" muttered a hard taloned follower of The Hawk. "A very *tigre*, that one! God rest his soul!"

El Halcón took off his army cap. Those men who had not lost their sombreros in struggle now bared their own heads. Others touched their foreheads. The veterans knew how to honor a worthy antagonist.

For long seconds silence gripped the room. Then The Hawk, ever subconsciously alert, detected a slight movement of the captive. His eyes snapped upward.

"Stand still!" he coldly advised. "You can't reach your gun again. Don't try it!"

Culebrón did not try. He had not tried. His hands still were raised. But a shudder had gone through him, and his eyes now were wide and black with utter panic. He was tensed, not to fight, but to spring at the men blocking his way and attempt insane flight. Now, as the gray gaze impaled him, he shuddered again, but stood rigid.

The Northerner's lips twisted. He surveyed the bloated, barefoot figure in stained pajamas, the bristle jawed, huge mustached face, with the disgust due a dirty quitter. But then, as he again met the staring eyes, his own sharpened. Something in them impinged deep into his brain. This jungle monster's terror was not merely of a federal officer, not of a captor, not of a Hawk whose name he did not yet know, but of something more—something farther back.

"*Dios!*" ejaculated Arnaldo Chanaro. His pupils shrank to pinpoints, his lips to a slit. His fists gripped hard on the butts of his revolvers, now holstered. Slowly, very slowly, he loosed his holds on those weapons. But his eyes remained icy and intensely hard.

"So—o—o!" he drawled. "It is you!

Bien. We shall talk together *muy pronto.* Until then stand exactly as you are."

His men, listening, frowned in puzzlement. Two of the oldest studied the frozen Culebrón. They could not remember seeing him anywhere, but something about him seemed familiar.

"Move out!" broke in their commander's voice. "Take these hurt men and attend to them at once. Take this dead man and lay him in another room. Then, Pascual, divide the force and search all houses. Guard all exits from the town. Leave two men at the door outside here. Report to me later."

Swiftly the room was cleared. Outside sounded the stentorian orders of Pascual. Then fell virtual silence. And then Arnaldo Chanaro spoke, low but menacing, to the rum swollen, crime befouled Culebrón, who once had been the slender, suave Teófilo Funereo, bookkeeper on a Guárico ranch.

"Now, you slimy snake," he demanded, "what did you do with my wife?"

CHAPTER XII

DEFIANCE

DESPERATION can descend only to certain depths. Then it must rebound or break. And Teófilo Funereo could not have attained his recent power without considerable resilience. Now, surprisingly, he vaulted from panic to bravado.

"Your wife?" he throatily echoed. "Let me see, that would be the Señora Chanaro, of Guárico? *Sí,* of course. I have had so many wives of other men that I must think back to remember. And if you are not afraid to let me sit down I can think more comfortably."

His voice was insolent, his eyes more so. Perhaps, observing the respect paid the hardy Emilio, he thought to obtain better treatment by assuming audacity. Instead, he came near proceeding at once to join his faithful defender. Chanaro's fists clenched again on the black butts. But then, unspeaking, he nodded.

Against one wall lay an overthrown desk and upset chairs, knocked over in the swirl of fight. Toward them Culebrón now padded, stepping on the wet blood of the heroic Paez as unfeelingly as if treading on a caterpillar. His glance darted through the heavily barred window, noting with astonishment that no soldiery was thronging the plaza. He had heard the bugles, the shots, the yells of attack and rout. But now he discerned only a few armed men working along the line of visible houses and a crippled boy wolfishly watching his squalid *palacio.*

"*Ajo!* Where are your troops?" he blurted.

"There are none," taunted Chanaro. "Only half a hundred cattle herders, who scared your hundreds of brave snakelets into the river. I am El Halcón."

The other's bloodshot eyes bulged, then blackened with rage at realization of the ignominy of such a defeat. To be overwhelmed by a federal army would be bad enough. To be terrorized into surrender by a numerically inferior band of outlaws was the most despicable form of downfall, destroying not only his power but his ferocious reputation and his swollen self-conceit. He writhed, mentally and physically. The fact that his captor was the far famed Hawk, who long had outwitted the entire national government, was no balm to his stricken vanity.

"Take your chair," bade his conqueror. "And don't touch any drawer of that desk. Sit yonder against the wall!"

As the other sullenly obeyed he remained standing, bleak, hard, towering over the squat huddle of flesh which scowled up at him.

"Now, the truth!" he bit.

"That's what you'll get," retorted the ugly malefactor. "Believe it or not.

"Your wife was sick of you and your ranch. So was I. She wanted life. So did I. We went out together to find it. We were going to Europe. But the sweet, loving God, so full of mercy and tender kindness—" His teeth gleamed sarcastically—"would not allow us to reach happiness. He sent a *chubasco*—a squall—that

tipped over our canoe just after we reached the Orinoco. Your woman drowned.

"Two of our paddlers also went down. I and the other two barely managed to reach shore. That's all the story, except that the money you so kindly gave us for our voyage went to the bottom too. If you want it, go and dive for it."

He grinned again. The Hawk's talons twitched. He eyed the brazen miscreant piercingly. Was the devil lying? It was easy enough to blame the disappearance of Señora Chanaro on a squall, but—

"You're a liar!" he charged. "You let her fall prisoner to Indians!"

"EH? INDIANS?" Culebrón stared blankly. "Oh! Ho-ho! Now I remember. You're talking about that pair of romantic young fools who got caught after we passed down. I heard about that. And you thought we were they? That's one on you. We had no trouble at all until the squall broke."

The gray eyes continued to bore into him. He met them unflinchingly.

"Your reason for eloping with my wife was, I suppose, that you loved her?"

"Bah! No!" The traitor rejected the proffered excuse. "Neither did she love me. She loved nothing but herself, as you ought to know. As for me, do you think I am fool enough to care for any woman? They all are nothing but female animals, made only to serve the needs of men. Your own female was nothing to me but a ticket to Europe. I will say, though, that it was she, not I, who first thought of the scheme. But I was willing enough. I needed a change of climate."

"And more distance between you and the Caracas magistrates."

"The same thing." Culebrón shrugged. "And I got it, thanks to your woman. She and your bolívares went to hell together, but I had her jewels. I got them from her by telling her the boatmen must not be allowed to see them; and when I had to swim for my life they were in a little bag under my shirt. I sold them at Ciudad Bolívar, bought a *piragua* and many trade goods, and came here. And I did well, very well!"

"Humph! When that canoe swamped did you try to save my wife?"

"No. Am I an idiot? I hardly saved myself. Have you ever seen a *chubasco?*"

The Hawk had. Twice, while campaigning along the Orinoco, he had seen those sudden terrific whirlwinds sweep the waters. He realized that no small boat caught by such elemental force could live in the resultant turmoil, and that only strong swimmers could reach land. And the effrontery of the prisoner, the gratuitous revelation that he had founded his diabolical power on a dead woman's gems, convinced his inquisitor that he was telling blunt truth. The faithless wife had been destroyed by accident, if not by the retributive hand of God.

Yet the wronged rancher, with fierce memories resurgent, gripped his belt hard to keep his hands from snatching the pendent weapons and riddling the betrayer with bullets. Something in the watchful eyes and sneering smile of the humbled monarch told him that, by some reversal of impulse, the recent craven now would welcome sudden death; that he feared some fate more lingering. Close on the heels of this perception came cold common sense, reminding him that his motive in coming here was not to kill a man long supposed dead, but to provide for his own continuance of life.

"Very well," he clipped. "I am here to collect indemnity. My men now are gathering your steel and lead. I will take your gold. Where is it?"

Culebrón, showing his fangs again, retorted—

"Try to find it!"

The victor's jaw muscles arose in ridges on his lean cheeks. But, without speaking, he looked around. The room was evidently an office. Against the wall behind him stood a black iron chest, not unlike the one long ago plundered in his own business quarters by the thief now at

his mercy. As his gaze fixed on it, the observant captive derided:

"The key is in the top drawer of the desk, Chanaro. Use it, and see how much gold you will find!"

The glacial eyes returned to his.

"I shall," promised The Hawk. "And if I find no gold—there are ways to learn secrets. Do not delude yourself, Teófilo. You will live awhile longer. Too long, perhaps!"

THE GROSS face against the wall paled. Although El Halcón had never tortured a prisoner and had no intention of doing so now, Culebrón did not know that. And he knew all too well the jungle methods of acquiring information. Therefore the calculated, suggestive words froze him with renewed terror.

"Meanwhile, get out!" crisply ordered his conqueror. "You have a prison pen here, I have heard. Go to it!"

With that he raised his voice, shouting:

"*Halcones! Aquí!* Hawks, come here!"

The pair guarding the outer door strode in.

"Take this gentleman to the prison," directed their leader. "If any other prisoners are found there, bring them to me. Do you know where it is?"

"Down this street, Capitán, beyond the end of the plaza," readily answered one. "Three of our boys are working now at the lock of the gate. There are men inside, shouting for release and food."

"*Bien.* When they are out throw this one in. Inspect the place carefully before leaving him. Make sure that no weapon or way of escape exists there."

"*Sí.* Come here, you!"

Culebrón, still unrecognized as Teófilo Funereo by any one except his former employer, grudgingly obeyed, wordless, but glowering venomous hate. Out he shuffled into the corridor. There, instead of turning toward the outer door, he moved toward another room.

"Halt! Where are you going?" demanded one of his guards.

"To get my clothes," was the reply.

"And what else?" suspiciously inquired El Halcón, behind him. "You will need no clothes in prison. Get out, I said!"

After another glare, the other clamped his fat jaws and went. Flabby, unshaven, uncombed, unwashed, he emerged into the brilliant sunlight, to find himself revealed at his bestial worst to most of his immediate world. The plaza, so recently almost empty, now had become populous. Deserted women and children had already learned that they had nothing to fear from the raiders; also, that the man so long their merciless despot was now at the mercy of his conqueror. So they had gathered, avidly curious, to watch the clay house and listen for the welcome death shots.

Half way across the square they stood grouped, held from nearer approach by a couple of riflemen. The only one close to the house was the crippled boy who had guided The Hawk. Now, as the prisoner bent a malignant scowl on all beholders, a hissing intake of breath sounded from the adults, a doglike growl from the misshapen youngster. And as the repulsive shape began shambling down the narrow street that youth angrily yelled:

"*Cra!* Señor El General, will you not kill the beast?"

"Not now, son," declined The Hawk. "First let him meditate on his sins."

"*Madre de Dios*, that will take him a thousand years!"

Culebrón paused, face contracted, mouth down curved, to rasp at him—

"Shut your mouth, you misborn whelp, before I strangle you!"

"Get on!" ordered a guard, prodding him with rifle muzzle.

Muttering, he resumed his way. The boy, quivering with fury, hobbled after him.

"Kick him!" he screamed. "Big soldiers, kick him! He kicked me! I have not the legs to kick in my turn! Kick him for me, *por amor de Cristo!*"

The guards glanced at him, at each other, back at The Hawk. They had heard many a grim tale of the cruelty of

this burly bulk. They saw no countermand in the face of their leader. El Halcón simply shrugged, turned on a heel, walked back inside. Forthwith one of them gratified the thirst of the deformed boy for fitting revenge.

So the erstwhile mighty Culebrón passed from the sight of his long abused subjects, cursing, grimacing, lurching down a dirty street, kicked into a dirtier prison at the behest of a crippled child. And that degradation was nothing, less than nothing, compared to the punishment which other San Fernandans were soon to demand.

CHAPTER XIII

BLACK BOOKS

DAY PASSED, and night. During the sunlit hours, and well into the dark ones also The Hawk was busy. First, of course, he took the requisite steps to hold the town against any counter attack. Thereafter he had the captured arms and ammunition stored, opened the iron chest, examined records, heard new tales of the long reign of terror, and thought deeply.

For a time, however, he suspended all other activities to bury Emilio Paez and the few others who had died in fight. Except the heroic bodyguard, all fallen San Fernandans had fought in sheer selfish desperation, knowing themselves trapped; and their interment was unceremonious. To Emilio, on the other hand, went the tribute of the brave to the brave.

In the house-to-house search, a score of skulking men had been discovered in various hiding places; cravens who, even when caught and dragged forth, lacked the courage to use their weapons; the dregs of Culebrón's disloyal aggregation of cutthroats. These were put to [work in the crowded local cemetery, digging graves for better men. When their labor there was done they acted as porters of the bodies to rest there—except that of Emilio. He was borne, at the head of the funeral column, by the raiders themselves.

Except for the sentries and the wounded plainsmen, all the victors escorted him. And El Halcón himself delivered the few final words at his graveside.

"Whatever this man may have done to bring him into such rotten company, or afterward, is wiped clean by his manly loyalty and bravery," he declared. "God loves brave men, and will rest his soul. And we shall remember him and honor his memory, as we now honor his corpse. Good fighter, *adios!* Hawks, salute!"

Bugles blew. Across the open grave a squad fired an upward volley. All other raiders raised their sombreros. Then, as the laborers began shoveling, the fighters marched back into the town.

There The Hawk devoted himself in earnest to the work of collecting his spoils of war. In guns and cartridges he fared handsomely. The rifles were numerous, and many were almost new, the bullets almost countless. Evidently a recent shipment of weapons had come in from Brazil. When he sought gold, however, he found himself checkmated.

The iron chest, unwilling legacy of the murdered federal governor, proved as much a mockery as the invitation of Culebrón to open it. When the lid was lifted, the repository was found to contain only old records and letters of the bygone official, plus a number of ledgers with entries made by the man now in jail. Teófilo Funereo, once bookkeeper, later trader, had not given up the habit of keeping accounts; nor had he destroyed those of his predecessor, which might contain information worth occasional reference.

AFTER a complete and futile search of the house for money, the invader settled down to studious perusal of the books and other records of Teófilo. He knew that, for the present, the defiant jailbird would reveal nothing. Moreover, he was in no mood to ask further questions of the creature who had taken his wife and money and founded a villainous power on jewels given in love. Mental wounds

long healed, but still scarred, had torn wide open again, aching with increasing pain. Partial surcease lay in the study of these books. On them he concentrated.

Outside, women, armed for conquest with their best clothing and most captivating wiles, sought access to him, only to meet adamantine rebuff from the guards, then tried to intrigue the fancies of the guards themselves, with somewhat better success but no abandonment of duty. Men, too, in the sycophantic shapes of the gravediggers, tried to ingratiate themselves, only to be driven off by harsh language backed by gun muzzles. The only people to pass the portal were the ex-prisoners, now well fed, whose admittance had been ordered by El Halcón.

There were three of these, all markedly superior to their jailer: a Spaniard from the Rio Ventuari, a German from the Casiquiare, a Frenchman from the far Padamo; men who had left their native lands for reasons which remained unrevealed, but who were steady eyed and straightforward. The first was a rubber dealer, the others traders. All had been summarily arrested on some flimsy accusation by forces sent out by Culebrón and brought hither, to be first starved and hoodwinked by false promise into revealing the hiding places of their money, then to be killed. From them the new master of San Fernando learned much.

Heretofore he had largely discounted the gruesome stories which had come down the Orinoco; for he knew well the propensity of tale bearers to exaggerate. Now he learned that, for once, far traveling reports had not even revealed the entire truth. Calmly the three clear eyed men told him of crimes which they knew to be unquestionable, deeds which made the casehardened listener squirm inwardly. When they had finished he marveled—

"Why do men like you come to such a hell?"

"Why," smilingly countered the German, "did you come to it?"

"Pardon me," apologized the questioner. "That was a thoughtless inquiry. But, since you ask, I came to get what I could."

"So did we," nodded the Spaniard. "There is gain here—or death. It is a gamble. The loser pays, as always. We have gained a little, and now may gain more, if you will kill that snake of a Culebrón. Others have not been so fortunate as to live until you could come."

"If you desire the names of those unlucky ones," added the Frenchman, "you will find them in the black books. It is well known up here that Culebrón has kept two black books. In one is the list of men killed at his command, in the other, the names of those who are yet to be killed."

El Halcón glanced at the haphazard pile of books at his elbow. Among them were two small ones with black backs. He yanked them forth.

The cover of one was blank. On the other, carefully drawn with red ink, was a cross.

He flipped open the latter. There was a list of names. Before each name was a date, after it, a number. Each number was in the thousands.

The three arose and converged at the desk, drawn by unconquerable curiosity. As The Hawk turned pages and reached the last entry the Spaniard exclaimed:

"*Sí!* There is Francisco Guevara! He was beheaded last week! And Culebrón got twenty-four thousand bolívares! *Cra,* I did not suppose Francisco had that much!"

After the name of Francisco Guevara was the figure named: 24,000.

"*Válgame Dios!*" ejaculated The Hawk, eying the long record of mercenary murders. "All these?"

"And many more," placidly answered the German. "Those are the names only of men with money. Many a poor devil with only a few pesos has been cut up for pleasure, then thrown into the river. And as for women—"

"Enough said!" snapped Chanaro. "Good day, gentlemen! I shall see you later."

When they were gone he frowningly

perused both the black books more attentively. The book of future killings contained most of the names later entered in the other, plus a dozen not yet chronicled under the sinister crimson cross. Before each of the names which had been transferred was a date, but after it was no sum. Instead, always written in full, with a flourish indicating gratification, were two words:

Cuenta ajustada. (Account settled.)

It was clear that the slayer had deliberately doomed each man before even capturing him, methodically predetermining the date on which he would send out a gang to get the victim. Cold blooded calculation could hardly have been more callously portrayed than by those proscriptions.

He flung the loathsome revelations to the floor and sat narrowly eying the blank wall opposite. Did he, who had lightly given away federal funds to the poor of the *llanos*, now wish to use for himself blood money gained by foul slayings? Instinct revolted. Yet a stern voice within him dictated:

"Whether you will or not, you must! Today is not yesterday. Your affairs have changed. Now you need money. More, you have promised it to your men. You must take it! Find it!"

With a grimace, he resumed his search for the unfound gold.

AT LENGTH he discovered something that momentarily angered him, yet quickly brought an unreasonable feeling of relief. The mocking invitation of Culebrón to find his gold had been well based. His monetary wealth was nowhere in the house, nor in San Fernando, nor even in Venezuela. It was a thousand miles away in Brazil.

Within the past few weeks he had transferred his criminal gains to a bank at Manaos. By what means he had effected the safe transportation of the money, and with what motive, none but himself knew. Perhaps some dull premonition had warned him that the end of his reign approached; or perhaps his constant fear of assassination served the same end, moving him to prepare for flight. At any rate, there were the records of receipt and deposit by the bank. By comparison, any money he might have acquired since then would be paltry plunder for a half hundred men. And The Hawk determined not to seek it. He knew he would always feel cleaner for having avoided its contact.

He arose, stretched his arms, smiled, as if just rid of an onerous load. Then his glance fell to the black books, and his lips set once more. After a few strides up and down he told his orderly:

"The town people can come in now; one at a time, and only those with something to say. Any who wish only to stare and simper can stay out, or get out faster than they come in."

Thereafter, sitting straight and cool behind the desk, he gave the visitors such treatment as they merited. Women or men who sought only to curry favor were summarily dismissed. Others, bringing information well worth listening to, were accorded more leniency; in fact, some were questioned long and sent away with a friendly smile. Although many of the women of the place were harlots or harridans, some few were neither; women who had lived there before the coming of the Culebrón gang, and who, though repeatedly outraged, had retained mental decency. Moreover, more than one of those who had abandoned themselves to profligacy as the only means of existence were glad to escape from their slavery and gratefully ready to tell their deliverer whatever might be useful to him. All such informants were received and dismissed with courtesy.

The hearings ended only when fatigue forced their cessation. Then the hearer walked out into the plaza and lay flat on the ground, to sleep as he had slept many a time on the plains. In the lair of Culebrón, he knew, he could not rest well. Also, he wished to gaze up once more at his stars.

One revelation by the recent visitors caused him to keep his entire force on duty, in two hour watches, through the night. Not all the San Fernando garrison had been here at the time of his surprise attack. Two days before his arrival Culebrón had sent out nearly a hundred men, in two detachments, to bring in new victims—rubber dealers who had large gangs of workmen and who might fight. These detachments might return at any time. They were well armed, outnumbered his own command by two to one and, if met and warned by the refugees, could make a sudden concerted assault which might overwhelm the present masters of the town. Therefore sharp eyes and ears kept guard until dawn, when all watches stood to arms. However, no attack developed. The absent outlaws remained somewhere out in the unknown distances.

Aside from this contingency, the man in the plaza had only the problem of his own course on the morrow to consider; that, and the hideous things just poured into his ears, and the spirit behind the pouring, all necessarily interrelated. The third of these was the direct outgrowth of the second, leading him in reverse order to the first. It was a vindictive, ferocious hatred such as he had never before witnessed.

In the course of his long campaigning he had often met displays of bitterness by misgoverned people toward their deposed oppressors. But the virulent rancor of these San Fernandans against their fallen czar surpassed anything the Northerner had seen or imagined. And their evidently unexaggerated accounts of his cruelties proved their ingrown malice not only natural but justifiable.

For some time he lay, narrow lidded, resolutely excluding from mind his own personal score against Teófilo Funereo, considering the case of the people versus Culebrón. Having settled it, he meditated briefly on other matters. Then, watched over by the bright eyes in the sky and by vigilant sentries pacing the square, he slept, dreamless, until light swept away the night and brought the deeds of another day.

CHAPTER XIV

JUDGMENT

"PASCUAL," announced The Hawk to his second in command, "I can not keep my promise to the men. There is no gold here. Culebrón removed it weeks ago to Brazil. We could not get it even if we went after it. And we are not going."

The two sat in the office. Pascual looked momentarily sober. Then he shrugged.

"It is no loss," he philosophically remarked. "They would only squander it, as usual. And perhaps we can find some at some other place."

"That is just what I mean to do. We shall start *pronto* down the river and back to our *llanos*. We shall take with us all weapons and cartridges. There are many more guns here than we need for ourselves, but we can find use for them. When we return to the plains we shall accept recruits—as many as we can arm. They will flock to us fast enough, when they hear of our exploit here and learn that we have rifles to give them. Soon we shall have a band twice as large as we ever had. And when we have them we shall be more businesslike. When we capture federal money we shall keep most of it for ourselves. We have been reckless boys. Now we shall be men; reckless still, no doubt, but somewhat sensible."

"*Buenol*" heartily approved Pascual. "*Muy buenol*"

"Tell the men," continued the commander. "And send some to get boats. We can not carry everything in the canoes. There are several old *piraguas*, people tell me, moored in a creek above the town. Have them brought down."

The lieutenant arose quickly, then stopped.

"Ah—there is another matter, Capitán," he suggested.

His shaggy head tilted in the direction

of the prison pen down the street.

"I am not forgetting it. Carry out my instructions."

"*Sí.* At once! But a moment. Have you noticed that there is something about this filthy pig that reminds one of Teófilo Funereo? Several of the men have spoken of it. The eyes and the voice are—"

"Why bring back the dead?" sharply cut in The Hawk. "Funereo was killed long since, as every one knows. *Vaya!*"

"*Sí!* Pardon!"

Left alone, Arnaldo Chanaro sat for long minutes, lids and lips drawn tight, gaze fixed on nothingness. Then his eyes moved, rested on the splotch of dried blood staining the floor where had lain Emilio Paez, moved again, to pause on the black books.

Abruptly he kicked back his chair and marched out.

Most of his men were gathered in the plaza, discussing something with manifest pleasure. Plainly they had received the news borne forth by Pascual and, having digested it, shrugged away the temporary disappointment of present monetary loss to vision the near future. Plainsmen all, they were already tired of this up-Orinoco country and growing homesick for the vast plains and their horses. The prospect of immediate return and of redoubled power had banished every incipient grumble.

Now, as their beloved El Halcón appeared and they saw him in his prairie clothing instead of the masquerading uniform, voices yelled affectionate greeting and hands rose in spontaneous high signs of the *llanos*.

His set face softened an instant, then hardened again. Crisply he called:

"Sound bugles! Bring all town people here!"

Imperative notes blared. Men walked fast away to bawl the command along the few short streets. People flocked from all quarters to mass before the tall Halcón. When all had come and expectant silence ruled, he spoke, curt, concise, faintly satiric.

"MY MEN and I have come to visit your town. We do not like it much. So we are going away. When we are gone your own brave defenders may come back. But I doubt it.

"Before we go, one matter must be settled. You have been governed by Culebrón. I have put him in prison. If you wish him to rule again when I have gone, say so now, and I will release him. If not, say what else you want. This is your town, not mine. Do what you like with it. What shall I do with Culebrón?"

He ceased, stood coolly watching faces. Those faces convulsed with the suppressed hate of long years.

"Kill him!" burst a blast of voices. "Kill the scoundrel! Kill him! Kill! Kill! Kill!"

The scream of concentrated ferocity rang far over the small town. It smote the ears of Culebrón himself, in the half roofed pen a half block away. Worse followed.

"Kill him *poco á poco*—little by little!" shrieked the mob. "Cut him up slowly! Burn out his eyes, his tongue! Flay him! Make him die little by little, the fiend!"

A woman sprang forward, hands outstretched, eyes blazing.

"Give me his tongue, *caballero!* The tongue that ordered my man murdered, the tongue that gave my little girl to one of his beasts! Give it to me that I may spit on it!"

"To me give his forefinger!" screeched another woman. "The finger that shot my father! Let me cut it off myself! Let me—"

A confused outburst from the rest drowned her further words. They swept at the raider in mad rush, vociferating demands appalling in their savagery, reaching hands which clawed and clutched. Never before had El Halcón retreated from anything he could see. But now he stepped back, sickened.

"Silence!" he yelled. "Be still! Listen to me!"

They quieted, though their eyes still

flamed and their fingers worked like claws of infuriated jaguars.

"Is there any man, woman, or child who wishes Culebrón to live?" he called. "Let no other speak!"

Silence. Dead, bitter silence. No voice answered. Nor did any face alter.

"Very well. Go at once to the other side of the plaza. Stay there. Hawks, hold every one outside the fence there! Four of you remain here with me—Gregorio, Ramón, Timoteo, José! All others, go!"

Grudgingly, then more rapidly, the crowd gave way and retreated before the prompt and not too gentle compulsion of the riflemen. While the human herd crossed the plaza the commander strode off toward the prison, followed by his chosen four.

At the pen gate a guard who had seen the quintet coming was already at work on the lock, using a hooked wire which awkwardly served the purpose of the vanished key. He opened the barrier and followed through.

Culebrón, ghastly pale, stood in the farthest corner of the pen, back to the wall, hands flattened against it on each side as if to brace himself. His wrinkled pajamas quivered visibly at the knees. The stark terror of contorted face and shaking body testified that he had heard the demands of his erstwhile slaves.

"Come here!" bade El Halcón.

"What—what will you do to me?" gasped the shrinking prisoner.

"No more than you have done to other men."

The gray eyes were expressionless, the promise emotionless. The vivid memories of the deeds which he himself had perpetrated on helpless victims made the wretch almost collapse.

"*Oh Dios!*" he moaned. "No—no—not that! Give me a knife—poison—anything—"

"Come out here! I promise you four clean bullets. Your own bullets! No more, no less. Will you walk to them like a man, or must you be dragged?"

For several seconds the quaking felon stood regarding him fixedly. Then he gulped:

"Nothing else? You mean it? It is a promise?"

"A promise."

THE KNEES ceased shuddering. The gross torso gradually stiffened. The jowled jaw clenched. Teófilo Funereo, concealed within that bloated shape, knew that Arnaldo Chanaro had never violated his word. Culebrón, studying the unchanging eyes of El Halcón, believed that word to be still good. Death, sudden death, the fear of which had so long ridden his brain, now was but a trivial doom compared to the lingering torment which he had just heard demanded outside. So he lurched forth from the supporting wall and marched, unwavering, out to the street, and thence to the plaza.

As he entered the square, a hiss ran along the line of spectators, rising swiftly to a babel of execration.

"Stop that noise at once!" snapped The Hawk.

His men, with fierce threats and sharp blows, quelled the tumult.

Culebrón, moving like an automaton, muscles rigid, steps mechanical, walked to a low *sarrapia* tree, against the broad green head of which his shirt formed a plain target. There he stood wooden.

The four riflemen, all sure shots, took position in line. Cool, unemotional, they awaited command. Ten feet aside, El Halcón stood equally controlled.

"Culebrón," he called clearly, "have you anything to say?"

Culebrón, eyes on the vindictive faces lining the farther rail, said one word through his teeth—

"Shoot!"

The Hawk spoke quietly.

Rifles rose, took steady aim.

Another word.

Crash!

Culebrón plunged forward on his face and was still. Upon the back of his shirt rapidly spread a huge patch of crimson.

Rifles were lowered.

CHAPTER XV

OUT

BOATS, loaded with men and weapons, crept down the Orinoco.

Old, battered hulls, laid away in a shady creek by their recent owners in half hope that they might last until the next season of rubber collecting, they still were sturdy enough to carry away half a hundred raiders and their plunder. On them journeyed also a few San Fernandans, male and female, who sought new life somewhere down in the wider north country. All other denizens of the fallen bandit capital had elected to remain amid their sloth and sin. Now they probably were ransacking the quarters of the buried Culebrón, and reviling the Northerners who had cheated them of the vengeance they craved by executing him *como caballero*—like a gentleman.

Those plainsmen, on the other hand, now gave no more thought to the vanquished and vanished town than they would bestow on a sucked lemon. Raising and lowering long sweeps, they eyed with misgiving the rocks and riffles and whirls along their watery road, pulling with just enough energy to give steerage way on the stealthy currents. The voyage which had been a hilarious excursion while they were propelled by captured power and enslaved guides, was now an intensely serious problem to most of them, even though they had only to follow the pilot boat and listen to the jovial abuse of Pascual. That hirsute brigand, though inwardly uneasy, bawled back at them:

"Ho! You scaly lizards, you blundering buzzards, you brainless offspring of the manure piles, how long will it take you to grow webbed feet? *Por Dios*, if there is a rock you have not hit it is one we have not yet reached! Hawks? You? *Cra*, hawks have eyes! And do you think those oars are made to sleep on? Pull away, there! Pull for the horses at Atures, and the girls of the *llanos!* Or we who get there first will take them all!"

And so on, and so on. They grinned, but worried for the safety of the guns they were freighting.

El Halcón, on that first *piragua*, smiled at Pascual's rant and stood outwardly indifferent, but keenly watching the course. He had no more faith in the crawling element on which he rode than had his men. And, as usual, he was leaving nothing which could be foreseen to luck.

Luck was, in fact, once more behind him as strongly as the power of the Orinoco. After dealing him that one staggering blow in Guárico to teach him not to rely on it too long, it now was bearing him to renewed successes on the plains. But of this, though hopeful, he was not yet sure. Still less could he foreknow that the government, discouraged by its endless failure to obliterate him and overjoyed by his extermination of the Culebrón regime, would soon endeavor to bring him and his reinforced band into the ways of peace by a proffer of complete amnesty and a fat federal office. Had any prevision of this development come to him there on the river, however, he would have known instantly the nature of his future reply—a scornful refusal. The hypocritical life of crafty, grafty politics was not for him. No hawk can be metamorphosed into a parrot.

Smooth water, deep, free of menace, stretched for a half mile or more below the precipitous Castillitos. After a survey of the innocent surface ahead he swung to watch the following freighters. One after another they slid into the safe section, sweeps stiffly lifting and sinking, like grotesque, gigantic water bugs.

His eyes lifted from them to dwell a moment on the stone isles half blocking the river, grim gateway to a grisly town. That town, and the territory it ruled, and the snaky brained creature who had ruled it, all were gone forever from his adventurous life.

Facing once more to the north, he muttered two words of complete dismissal. They were the two conclusive words recorded in the funereal book of Funereo, late Culebrón:

"*Cuenta ajustada.* Account settled."

The CAMP-FIRE

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A Full Life—

IF NOT ALWAYS a merry one, has been the portion of Oscar E. Jensen, whose first *Adventure* tale, "Hornet," appears in the present issue.

The fiction background of any writer is his life. Here's mine. Use what you want of it.

Born on the banks of the Mississippi. (When? Why bring that up?) The river packets were still operating. Old sidewheelers; colored roustabouts singing at their work and all that. My first taste of romance.

Three gangs fought for supremacy; the river-rats, the lower end gang, and the Greenbush gang. When I lost the better part of an ear, I decided to become a pugilist. I was about fourteen then. Carrying papers and doing odd jobs. Ten children in the family—father earning $50.00 a month. One little girl went away; then there were nine. First taste of grief.

Lived across the alley from a big barn where were kept riding horses, carriage horses, and draft horses. Learned to love a horse.

Went to work in a sawmill. Then into railroading. Was instructor in gymnasium evenings. Learned to respect manhood.

Went to Cuba; then to Puerto Rico during Spanish American War. Drifted west after being discharged with the rank of private.

Rode for a while with men who were of the old West. Met and knew the Chisholms and those who had conquered the West.

Hit the trail for British Columbia. Learned to fight for the privilege of brushing my teeth in a logging camp. Then a turn at mining. Irrigation plans in Eastern Washington attracted me. Took a job in a bank and learned arithmetic.

Went to Europe to put over a mining deal. Blooey! Lived with the dock workers on the Isle of Dogs in the East End of London. Finally got a tip on a big thing in Iceland. Blooey! Landed in Paris. Learned something of real cruelty while trailing with an Apache. Interested Berlin manufacturers in Iceland spar from property I had investigated while in Iceland. (Iceland spar is used in manufacture of high-grade optical instruments.) Returned to London with money in my pocket. Saw the West End of London this time. Back to Paris. Met the most wonderful girl in the world. Went broke again.

Bob Fitzsimmons was sailing from Cherbourg. If they've made a finer man than Bob, I haven't met him. He had a rare sense of humor. He thought I might make a promising heavy. We entertained the passengers anyhow.

Made a stake during the real estate boom in Seattle. Lost it. Made another. Put on a townsite. Made a real stake. Police judge, justice of the peace, president of this, that, and the other. So busy I forgot to watch my money and went broke again.

Enlisted in first volunteer regiment organized on the Coast when war was declared. Missed all the fun by going early to the hospital. Couldn't get back. Was broke, sick, and fearfully in debt because of failing in business. Got married. Paid my debts. Made enough to enable me to lay off for a while. Went to school and learned to compose a sentence having a subject and a predicate. Wrote a story and sold it. Where do we go from here?—OSCAR E. JENSEN.

Secret Service

I BELIEVE that the following article —a really authoritative piece of work —will be of such great interest to readers of *Adventure* that I am presenting it in Camp-Fire. Unfortunately it is so long that I must hold over the second half until next issue.

But to any reader who has considered detective or investigative work as a profession, it should be invaluable.

I WAS keenly interested to read the answer of Lieutenant Townsend on page 188 of the "Ask *Adventure*" section of the August 15th issue of *Adventure* to the inquiry of Mr. Tom Jones of Wilmar, Minn., relative to the United States Secret Service.

During the late war it was my good fortune to be a special agent of the Bureau of Investigation of the United States Department of Justice, part of which time I was an assistant division superintendent of the Bureau. Before and after the war, I was also connected with several other investigative branches of the Federal Government, and at the present time I hold a commission in the Military Intelligence Reserve, General Staff, United States Army. I am taking the liberty, therefore, of amplifying the information furnished by Lieutenant Townsend.

While among the uninitiated all Federal investigative activities are hazily and haphazardly termed "Secret Service", there is strictly speaking only one investigative agency of the National Government officially known as the Secret Service. The Secret Service, properly so called, is operated under the general supervision of the Secretary of the Treasury. It is not a bureau but a division, its official designation being the Secret Service Division of the Treasury Department.

The Secret Service Division, as a formal organization, was first established on July 1, 1865, under an appropriation for the suppression of counterfeiting. Colonel Lafayette C. Baker, who was a noted figure in military secret service activities during the Civil War, made some of the first investigations for the Secret Service Division of the Treasury Department, and his reports created a sensation in Washington.

As time went on, other departments of the Government got into the habit of requesting the Treasury Department to make temporary assignments of secret-service operatives to these departments for special investigations. This practice became so general that it began to interfere with the normal functioning of the Secret Service Division. Therefore, under the Sundry Civil Act of May 27, 1908, the detail of investigators from the Treasury Department to other departments was prohibited. At present the activities of the Secret Service Division are confined to counterfeiting cases, cases involving the alteration of Government checks and obligations, and guarding the President.

DURING the Spanish-American War operatives of the Secret Service Division rendered praiseworthy service to the country. A number of brilliant exploits were performed by Secret Service men under the direction of John E. Wilkie, then Chief of the Division. During the World War also the Secret Service Division gave the best that was in it, under W. H. Moran, who was then and still is Chief of the Division.

Applicants for positions as operatives in the Secret Service Division of the Treasury Department should request an appropriate application form from the Civil Service Commission, Washington, D. C. If this application form, as filled out by the applicant, indicates that he has the required experience and background, he then will be given an oral examination. This oral examination is rather stiff, being designed to test the mental alertness of the applicant, as well as his general knowledge. If he passes this examination, his past life is then subjected to a most searching investigation. The slightest blot on his record will bar him. The names of applicants who are found mentally and morally qualified are placed on a waiting list, and appointments are tendered according to the need of the Service. Applicants must agree to accept appointment anywhere in the United States, and while in the Service they must be prepared to travel anywhere on a moment's notice. Field offices are maintained by the Secret Service Division in the larger cities of the country. The headquarters office of the chief is in Washington.

The Bureau of Investigation of the Department of Justice is the investigative branch of the Government which is very often erroneously referred to as the Secret Service. The first active steps for the organization of this Bureau were taken on July 1, 1908, just at the time the further detail of Treasury Department investigators to other departments was prohibited, as already outlined in the fifth paragraph of this letter.

The Bureau of Investigation is charged with the detection and prosecution of crimes against the Federal Government. While this Bureau has general authority to investigate *all* crimes and offenses against the Government, in practice it devotes its attention only to those cases which are not within the purview of other Federal investigative agencies. For instance, it does not investigate counterfeiting cases, which are handled by the Secret Service Division of the Treasury. Nor does it ordinarily investigate Prohibition or Post Office cases.

APPLICANTS for the position of special agent in the Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice, should request an application form from the Director, Bureau of Investigation, U. S. Department of Justice, Washington, D. C. These positions are not filled as the result of a Civil Service examination. Only persons trained in law, with past experience in or a decided bent for investigative work,

are considered for appointment. No one is appointed unless he is of high moral character with no blemishes on his record.

The Bureau of Investigation maintains offices in all cities where United States Attorneys are located. The first chief of this Bureau was Stanley W. Finch. Its present head is J. Edgar Hoover. His official title and address is Director, Bureau of Investigation, U. S. Department of Justice, Washington, D. C.

During the World War all espionage and counter-espionage activities in this country, except those of a strictly military or naval character, were carried on by the Bureau of Investigation of the Department of Justice under the supervision of A. Bruce Bielaski, who was then chief of the Bureau. The American Protective League, a volunteer organization of patriotic Americans—both men and women—rendered invaluable cooperative services to the Bureau of Investigation during the war. This organization was founded by A. M. Briggs of Chicago.

Besides the Secret Service Division in the Treasury Department and the Bureau of Investigation in the Department of Justice, there are a number of other Federal investigative activities. Chief among these are:

Special Agency Service, Department of State;
Division of Post Office Inspectors, Post Office Department;
Special Agency Service, Bureau of Customs, Treasury Department;
Intelligence Unit, Bureau of Internal Revenue, Treasury Department;
Income Tax Unit, Bureau of Internal Revenue, Treasury Department;
Coast Guard Service, Treasury Department;
Bureau of Immigration, Department of Labor; and
Bureau of Prohibition, Treasury Department.

THERE ARE still a number of other Federal investigative activities. In fact, every one of the ten Executive Departments of the Government has at least one investigative branch, and some of them have more than one. Besides, there are several investigative activities operating under the Independent Establishments of the Federal Government—that is to say, establishments which are not under the control of any of the Executive Departments.

Chief among the independent investigative activities are the following:

General Accounting Office, which reports directly to Congress (not to the President);
Civil Service Commission;
Federal Trade Commission;
Alien Property Custodian;
Interstate Commerce Commission; and the
U. S. Veterans' Bureau.

To the Post Office Department must go the credit for the establishment of the first corps of Federal investigators. In 1840 Amos Kendall, then Postmaster General, effected the organization of a group of special agents to investigate mail depredations. Even before then, at least as far back as 1836, there are records of activities of postal special agents. Later the title of these investigators was changed to post office inspectors.

The Division of Post Office Inspectors investigates all crimes and offenses in which the mails are involved. As might be expected, their work is both intensive and extensive. The public usually hears of them in mail-robbery and mail-fraud cases. Promotions to this division are made from the ranks of suitably qualified postal employees. No outsiders are employed.

Post office inspectors in the field operate under divisional inspectors located in strategic cities. All are under the supervision of the Chief Inspector in Washington. The Division of Post Office Inspectors has been long recognized as a sort of superior training school for Federal investigators, many of the "aces" who later achieved renown in other Services having served their apprenticeship therein.

The Special Agency Service of the Department of State, as presently organized, dates from the late war. A good deal of its present activity has to do with passport investigations. This service maintains a small but select corps of investigators. No appointments from the outside are being made.

The Special Agency Service of the Bureau of Customs was first established in 1871. Originally it was in charge of a Supervising Agent, O. D. Madge being the first incumbent of the office. During the war James W. Wheatley was Supervising Agent. On November 1, 1922, the office of Director of the Special Agency Service was created, and Nathaniel G. Van Doren was appointed to the office. On March 3, 1927, under the act abolishing the Division of Customs and creating the Bureau of Customs, Mr. Van Doren was made Deputy Commissioner of Customs. He is still in charge of the Special Agency Service.

The work of the Customs Special Agency Service is to combat smuggling and to bring smugglers to justice. To that end it maintains a corps of special agents at all American ports and in addition there are a number of veteran agents scattered abroad. Frequently in fiction relating to smuggling we read of the hazardous exploits of "secret service operatives" which rightfully should be credited to special agents of the Bureau of Customs. Appointments of outsiders to this Service are rarely if ever made, the usual practice being to promote employees of the Bureau of Customs who show talent and special aptitude for the work.

(To be concluded in Camp-Fire, in the next issue of Adventure)—JOHN B. MURPHY.

Careful, Brothers!

COMRADE CABRAL passes bad news quickly.

Sachems of the mystic circle, one who has for many years hovered on the outskirts of your fire humbly

craves your permission to join the mystic circle and bask in the warmth of your fire. My credentials will be given further down in this letter.

The main object of this letter is to give three cheers and one cheer more for W. C. Tuttle whose pen has once more revived the merry characters of Jovial PIPEROCK. Verily Tuttle old friend I love you as a brother for this timely resurrection. On with the dance; let joy be unconfined.

My acquaintance with *Adventure* and its excellent writers dates back to 1919 while I was stationed at Panama, since then I have read it continuously, sometimes under difficulties, but always welcoming each copy as one welcomes an old friend. I have perused your pages by the light of a gasoline lamp in a canvas tent with the occasional howl of a Mexican tiger to help my nervous system along, sometimes on a lonely sandbar with hordes of sandflies to interfere with my literary inclinations.

What is my profession? Brothers hush, it is that of one who passes the bad news quickly—a cable operator. My travels started in San Francisco, Calif., in the year 1912 when I was transferred to Honolulu. 1914 found me back in good old Frisco on the rocks, May of the same year I was enroute to Galveston, final destination unknown, arriving at Galveston was ordered to Vera Cruz where our Army and Navy were occupied doing something that they called an intervention.

From there I went to the west coast of Mexico to the little town of Salina Cruz where I was stationed for some time being transferred to San Juan Del Sur, Nicaragua, after about a year's time, this journey was made on a Dynamite Auxiliary Steam Schooner and I never will forget the fright I had when we bumped the dock at La Union Salvador. After another year spent in San Juan I was ordered back to Mexico and as no steamers were calling at SJ northbound had to make a three day trip on horseback to Granada from which point I caught a train to Corinto, Nicaragua's main port. My next station was Puerto Mexico then in quick succession followed Salina Cruz, Vera Cruz, Mexico City, Panama, San Jose de Guatemala, where I went in a managerial capacity, it was in Guatemala City that I met a gentleman who in all probability was the last of a long line of soldiers of fortune, namely, General Drummond, a fine old Scotchman who would get drunk and recite "Scots wae hae wi Wallace bled," with the tears streaming down his face.

I have been through nearly every revolution in Mexico since 1914. Does this entitle me to membership in Camp-Fire?

Now to pass on to a subject less monotonous, another of your writers that I am glad to see back again is Talbot Mundy. This gentleman to my opinion ranks next to Kipling in his stories of India.

Before closing I wish to say a word in favor of the much maligned Central American and Mexican. Fourteen years spent in Mexico and Central America have left me with nothing but the deepest gratitude and respect for the people of those countries. Never did I receive aught but the best and most courteous treatment at their hands; in fact, when I was on the beach at Vera Cruz, broke, jobless and married, the helping hand was extended to me by Mexicans only. My own countrymen did nothing, neither did I ask them. While with the Mexican Government I had to employ gangs of laborers and for loyalty, honest hard work, etc., my hat is off to the Mexican laborer. Of course he resents being treated like a dog, which I much regret to say is the way Americans that go down there generally try to do, and that, gentlemen, is the cause of so much friction. Hoping that this long winded letter has not bored you.—LOUIS A. CABRAL.

Training Camps

INDUSTRIAL America has gone into partnership with Uncle Sam to build men on the famous Plattsburg Plan.

As a result, Jimmy the office boy and Tom the machinist's helper will rub elbows this Summer with Bill the farmer's son and Ted the college athlete on a larger scale than ever before at those most democratic of America's institutions—the Citizen's Military Training Camps.

In their ninth year of successful operation, the 1929 C. M. T. Camps will again offer without expense to qualified youths thirty days of outdoor life, with wholesome food, uniforms, athletic equipment, railroad fare, and other necessary items supplied by the United States Government.

Cooperating this year with Army officials in a movement to increase the number of working boys attending these annual C.M.T.C. encampments are thousands of leading industrial firms and corporations in all parts of the country.

Employed youths will form a large percentage of the total of approximately 37,000 youths from every walk of life and every section of the United States who will take advantage of the Government's offer of training and open air camping at no cost. Alike only in that they are American citizens of good character and sound physique, the members of this huge volunteer force will present a view of what is called "the melting pot".

Industry's part in the C. M. T. C. movement dates from 1923, when a notable group of business executives, headed by Judge Elbert H. Gary, of the U. S. Steel

Corporation, Haley C. Fiske, late president of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, and Guy E. Tripp, chairman of the Westinghouse Electric interests, inaugurated a policy of cooperation.

At first these industrial leaders acted largely through patriotic motives. Special inducements were offered by many firms to encourage their young workers to go to the camps.

After the first contingent came back to their work, however, it was discovered that C. M. T. C. training was not only good patriotism but good everyday business efficiency as well. The C. M. T. C. trained youths, in sharp contrast to those who passed the usual vacation, returned with clearer eyes, firmer carriage, broader shoulders, a better sense of team-work, and a more cheerful reaction to discipline.

This summer still more firms will grant their employees opportunity to attend. Some will give a limited number an extra two weeks of vacation to complete the full thirty days of camp, with pay in some cases and without in others. Some firms will send selected workers to camp and in addition will extend the usual two weeks' vacation.

One method coming into wide vogue among industrial concerns is to establish a "C. M. T. C. Scholarship", the award going to the young man with the best record for the working year. More than one executive, Army officers report, has voiced the opinion that the influence of one C. M. T. C. youth has raised the morale of an entire department.

Admission to any of the C. M. T. Camps, which will open during June, July, and August throughout the United States, is offered to any youth who can pass the simple mental, moral, and physical tests and is between 17 and 24 years. Army recruiting offices, Army posts, or the Adjutant General of the Army, Washington, D. C., will send application blanks to interested persons.

Though opposed to war as waged nowadays, the editors of *Adventure* thoroughly approve the splendid training of these camps.

Goodbye, Fare You Well!

By Bill Adams

IN Dennis O'Halloran's barroom, down by the Newcastle pier,
(Was ever ye down to Newcastle lad?); I was sittin' drinkin' a beer,
An' treatin' a girl called Topsy, (Ye know the kind she'd be),
When somebody called from the doorway, "The *Silberhorn's* going to sea!"

An' I rose to my feet to see her, an' Topsy I pushed aside,
For ye'll see no ship like the *Silberhorn* go out wi' every tide.
An' I stood at the street side starin' to see the grand packet go by,
Wi' the sunset bright on her beauty, an' her ensign flutterin' high.

I saw John Warren, her skipper, wi' his eyes o' windy gray,
An' her first mate Willie Dougal, an' her second mate Tim O'Shay,
An' eight young bonny apprentice boys wavin' the girls farewell,
An' deep from the break of her focs'le came the clang of her big iron bell.

As her bells broke out while she passed me, a something gripped my breath;
As slow from her pier she glided, wi' the evenin' still as death,
The sun went under a cloud bank, an' the dusk came droppin' down,
An' the only sound was the laughter o' the girls o' Newcastle town.

They lowered the grand ship's ensign, an' she slipped away to the night
Till all I could see in the darkness was the gleam of her binnacle light.
As the girls turned back to the barroom, clear over the stream there came
The long high echoing sing-song of her chanteyman's refrain.

"Goodby, fare you well," I heard it, an' a cheer, an' an order loud,
As a lone star winked in the darkness from the rim of a driftin' cloud;
An' I called to Dennis O'Halloran to bring me a bottle o' beer,
An' I drank in the barroom doorway to the ship gone out from her pier.

O'Halloran's rang wi' laughter, but chilly there came o'er me
A feel like the feel o' the midnight when there's drift ice on the sea;
An' the fiddler started fiddlin'; an' Topsy tossed her head—
"You buys me no drink, nor dances? You acts like a man what's dead!"

So I called for a bottle for Topsy, an' forgot the sailor's way,
An' never gave thought to the *Silberhorn* for many an' many a day.
But when next I heard her mentioned I remembered the Newcastle pier,
An' the night when I'd drunk to her hearties in a bottle o' Newcastle beer.

"*Lost with all hands,*" I read it. "*Lost with all hands.*" No more.
Never a word o' the latitude, how far or how near to shore.
"*Goodby, fare you well,*" came ringin', an' a cheer, an' an order high,
From the grand fine packet at evenin' goin' out to the sea to die!

From the Heart

MORE OFTEN than sceptics might think, such a letter as the following comes to this office from some far place of the earth. It is a note from two Russian refugees, unedited lest some of the sincerity and genuine flavor be lost.

It is with pleasure to record it I would vote for your writer of tales of my own country, or that great Eastern part, which is also familiar to me as hardly less than of my natal place, which is Moscow and surrounding western Russian.

Since coming to abide in your country, with great thankfulness for place of refuge and living to be made without fear of death or imprison for us we find much mistakes about our country. We think because it is that you have here so many Jews from Russia who are NOT Russians, and some large amount of very foolish Russians also, who do not know that a Tsar maybe be very bad but also that others may be more worse yet. (The English it is harder to write than hear or speak, please. The French or the German—yes—it is more familiar to speak for us, pray excuse.)

This is that Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson seem to know much about our people and write well of them, knowing their spirit as well as outside appearance. Much, very much bad can be said, it is sadly true, but it is so large a country, more great than this and so many kinds of people (as like here), very different. So many are good too, kind like here, but much driven, much in dread of all life over there now, and for long time. So my people who live here many years make much mistake to think it good in Russia. Very bad, for many years yet I fear and if they go they very much think back to this country, how good it is, much better than *ever* Russia yet; what the future we can hope much, but not for long time; the Jew rule now where he came as refugee; as here, he will also, though he is most time very good citizen.

Seeing here many magazines and having been of educated class I seek intelligent magazine. Many very poor. Some very good. But to me is told that very fine is the ———. Greatly I am disappointed. Very young things in that magazine to us, who have so much heard of poor philosophies of life always. Our country greatly filled by young minds, or as the meaning: minds easy to make foolish with a little learning and reading of noisy thoughts, not deep or strong. So as my friends are reading this *Adventure* magazine and greatly like stories about life which is that which happen to many of us; now we get it.

There seeing, as my friends tell me, these stories of our country which are good we do, therefore wish to say in answer to your question that your best writer to us is Malcolm Wheeler Nicholson. The Tiger of the Ussuri and also the Dance of the Leopards, (Scarlet) which is much true, also. So many dark, hidden people now to take advantage of all troubles.

This is our choice, and to you we are

Respectfully,

VOLDEMAN CHAROFF AND RIASSA CHAROFF.

BUT the world is going to ask tremendous things of Russia during the next half century. There are encouraging signs everywhere that at last the Red régime of terror and economic upheaval is coming to an end. Let us hope and pray that this is true—not just another exemplification of shennanigan and hypocrisy!

—ANTHONY M. RUD.

ASK Adventure

For Free Information and Services You Can't Get Elsewhere

Riding

VARIOUS matters pertaining to the horse and his equipment.

Request:—"1. What is the proper position of the foot in the stirrup? Some say all the way in, some ride with their toe only and some say on the ball of your foot. Personally I seem to get a better grip using a fairly long stirrup and putting my foot in to the heel.

2. What bit do you prefer as being the easiest on the horse and still providing control in case of trouble? I am using a Pelham curb.

3. Do you prefer a single or a double rig in a Western saddle?

4. How is a hobble used? From front to back foot or on both front feet? What is the proper length?

5. Do you believe in posting to the trot? Is it the easiest way on the horse? I notice that some punchers use a very slight post while others seem to stand in their stirrups to the trot.

6. Are the results better to break a horse by slow easy methods or slap a saddle and bridle on and make him like it?

7. What book can I get that will give me the care and feeding, also methods of breaking and handling."

—G. B., Pittsburgh, Pa.

Reply, by Mr. Thomas H. Dameron:—1. Either is proper. Most cowboys ride with feet all the way in. In the Army and on the bridle path it is proper to put only the ball of the foot in the stirrup, with the stirrups long enough so that one can just raise the toe enough to put it in without raising the leg.

2. The Rugby Pelham with little or no port and short bar. If a horse begins to take the bit too much, I put a more severe bit on him for a short time. I use ten different bits in breaking my horses, and find the one most suited to the individual.

3. I prefer the single rig. There are three common single rigs: with the center or middle rig, the cinch comes in the center of the saddle; with the Spanish or seven-eighths rig, the cinch comes nearly as far forward as in front of the double rig; with the three-quarter rig, the stirrup strap goes through the cinch rigging. I prefer the latter.

4. Either way, front to opposite rear or two front. In first case, the hobble should be two and one-half to three feet. In the latter case, about twelve inches in length. If a sack hobble is used, it should be as light as it can be tied.

5. By all means post. It is easier on the horse as well as the rider.

6. A horse should never buck. He does it to protect himself through fear of injury. If handled carefully he will not fear you, and has no reason to buck, provided he has not been manhandled before you get him. A horse can be broken this way in a few weeks, while he generally is half broke for a year, or even more, if "busted".

7. "The Horse," by C. T. Davies, about fifty cents. Published by the Penn Publishing Company, Philadelphia, gives simple rules for care, feed, etc. Jesse Berry, Pleasantville, Ohio, gives a complete course in training for $15.00.

Small Arms

A CONCISE history of various types.

Request:—"Being a collector of somewhat amateurish ability and the proud possessor of quite a number of weapons, I would appreciate any short information you could send me on the following rifles and side-arms: Chassepot, French rifle, bolt action, single shot, carbine type; Lebel, French rifle, bolt action, three shot clip, infantry type; Luger, German automatic pistol; Colt, Civil War model, 31 caliber, six shots, revolver. Also, if possible, please send me some information on Belgian duelling pistols."—CHARLES ARMSTRONG AKIN, New Orleans, La.

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—The French rifle, the Chassepot, one of which stands beside me as I write, is the invention of M. Alphonse Chassepot, a French officer of the Third Empire, and seems to have been the French Service rifle at the time of the Franco-Prussian War. Some were altered to use the metallic cartridge, the original arm being one using a paper cartridge, and hence, undesirable as a gun for wet weather.

The Lebel carbine, of the present French service type, is a reliable little arm, but with the French ammunition seems to lack that degree of accuracy we associate with a modern rifle; with the UMC load, I believe it's an accurate arm. I own one, but never fired it.

The German Luger pistol was the Service pistol of the German Service, and as such, was used by them in the late World War in all branches of the Service. It was an accurate arm, when it worked right, but was prone to jam, and was not the likker the .45 we had proved to be. I see them now sold equipped with stock, telescope sight, Maxim silencer, etc., and even a thirty-two shot magazine—a portable machine gun, in fact. I have one of them also.

The old .31 Colt? Yes, a good revolver of the loose powder days, and a very popular one ere the coming of the metallic cartridge. Most of them seem to have been pocket arms, however, and the belt pistols of .36 and .44 calibers, although the reverse was sometimes true.

The Belgian duelling pistols are made today, in both breechloading and muzzleloading types, I believe, and represent very high workmanship indeed, when of the best makers' production. I do not know how many makes there may be, or have been, but they are of so many types and modes that they seem to be innumerable.

A book that will give much of the information about these arms is that by Satterlee, "Catalogue of Firearms for the Collector." Obtain it from your dealer at a cost of $4.00, I think. I'd recommend it highly, as I have a copy, and find it invaluable.

Photography

EQUIPMENT for developing prints.

Request:—"Would you please give me a list of equipment needed to develop small Kodak exposures?"—HARRY PARSONS, New York, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Paul L. Anderson:—To develop Kodak films you will need the following articles:

One Kodak developing tank, the correct size for your films.

1 hard rubber stirring rod.

1 8-ounce molded graduate.

1 thermometer, preferably a bath type, Fahrenheit scale.

1 porcelain lined tray, deep, about 11x14 inches (8x10 will do for the smaller sizes).

1 watch or clock.

Spring clips to hang up film to dry.

Developer.

Hypo.

A good supply of water (bath-tub or kitchen sink).

For developer, I would advise you to get the regular Kodak tank powders. For hypo, some people prefer the Kodak acid hypo, which keeps, and may be used repeatedly. I prefer to use plain hypo, mixing it fresh for each day's work, since you thus know that it is always full strength; the acid hypo becomes exhausted in time.

And I would advise you to get *and study* "How to Make Good Pictures," published by the Eastman Company, price 50c.

Canoe Trip

HELPFUL hints to the inexperienced adventurer.

Request:—"For some time my younger brother and I have been planning a long distance canoe trip. Recently, we found it is possible to paddle practically all the way from Philadelphia to Quebec, Canada, using canals and other waterways.

We will often be traveling on canals, and rivers polluted by manufacturing plants. How can we overcome the drinking water problem?

What kind of food is best to buy while traveling? We might catch some fish on rare occasions to help along, but what else could we get that would be nourishing, spending about a dollar a day between us? Could you give a sample 3-meal plan? We would like to stock the canoe up with as much food as possible at the home starting point. What would you suggest? Do you know if pemmican can be purchased in this part of the country? Would that be comparatively cheap and good for our meat supply? Should we take a canned heat outfit to help heat our food?

What kind of a location should we endeavor to pick out for a camping place at nights? Would blankets, and some clothes or newspapers, be sufficient protection from the damp ground? Of course, we would use a small tent for overhead shelter.

How many hours should we paddle a day? If we started at 7 A.M. how many hours should we allow for rest during the day's paddle, ending at approximately 5.30?"—J. J. DEVINE, Philadelphia, Pa.

Reply, by Dr. Claude P. Fordyce:—That canoe trip, as you have outlined it, is perfectly feasible.

Carry a can of water which you get from pure supplies such as city water pipes. You can get an empty five gallon rectangular can such as gasoline or oil comes in; steam or boil it out and use it to carry your main supply; then what you want for use pour into a desert water bag. It is a good plan to hang it from a frame when traveling so it will get the breeze; in camp hang from a tree. If there is any question about the purity of water boil it furiously for five minutes, then pour into a desert water bag

to cool. You can also purify it with Halazone tablets (Abbot Laboratories, Chicago.)

You will keep your expense down to a minimum by cooking your own meals and also sleeping in a tent. Use staple groceries that you can secure from towns along the route, just good nourishing food such as we use every day at home, with a minimum of meats however. I think my suggestions on keeping well, which I enclose should be followed. Don't carry too much food from home; get it along the route.

You need not stock up as if you were going into the wilderness; no need of pemmican, but it is good to have dried milk powder, powdered soups and vegetables which you can get from Abercrombie & Fitch, New York. I would prefer dried beef to pemmican on your trip. Do not used canned heat. Build a camp fire, or if you want to carry gasoline use one of the gasoline pressure stoves. The Branet Canvas Goods Co., in Philadelphia can outfit you complete, and I recommend them to you.

Plan on living in a tent and sleeping on the ground. You will need a bed pad next the ground and a sleeping bag apiece, which you can make at home. For each bag lay a wool batt comfort or quilt on the floor and over this a good wool blanket. Fold over both the long way and sew up three-fourths the way on the side and across the bottom. For the bed pad just use a sack of light cloth the size of the sleeping bag bottom and fill it at each camp site with leaves, hay, straw or whatever is handy for the pad.

Start in easy and don't work too hard. Try four hours in morning and four hours in afternoon and have plenty of time to camp and relax. Stop at noon one hour and have at least a warm drink then with lunch.

Dog

ON THE care of a Belgian shepherd.

Request:—"I have a Belgian shepherd dog (male) about four months old. I would be grateful for any information you can give me on the following points:

a. Feeding.

b. General care.

c. Name and publishers of any good book on the above points.

d. At what age should the dog's ears become erect? At present they are erect one day and flopping the next."

—LIEUT. JOSEPH GERLINSKI, Fort Dupont, Del.

Reply, by Mr. John B. Thompson:—In regard to your Belgian dog, have a dry, well sheltered kennel in the open, facing south preferably. Give it plenty of exercise, feed it a balanced ration of meat, vegetables and cereals, keeping corn meal away from it. Worm it twice yearly. "The Police Dog," price $1.00, from Sportsman's Digest, Cincinnati, is a good book for you. I think your dog's ears will become erect and stay thus very soon; but, if you have doubts about it at present, I would take him to a competent veterinarian. Many of them do not have erect ears until they become one year of age.

Quinine

PERU and Bolivia offer a fine field for American trading ventures, but one needs wide contacts to find such divers items of export as butterflies, dried humming birds, rubber, red bark and copal.

Request:—"I heard there were prospects for a man in Peru and Bolivia who enters the trading game with the Indians of this region.

What is quinine bark and cocaine bark worth a pound in trade and where is the best place to obtain these barks?

Also rubber, feathers, dried humming birds, butterflies, sarsaparilla, copal, and other valuable trade goods?

Is any cocaine extracted from the bark in Peru or any of the other S. A. countries?

What are duties on all these products into the U. S. A.?"—AL. B. JONAS, Elizabethton, Tenn.

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—There might be a chance for a man to get into the trading game in Peru and Bolivia. There are many natives who make a living at this game and there is no reason why an American couldn't get into it on a somewhat larger scale and make money at it.

The price of red bark (quinine) varies in different sections, due to distance away from market, etc. The American consul in La Paz can possibly tell you the current price at that place. Cocaine is not extracted from the bark but from the leaves of a bush. These leaves are dried and packed in rawhides. The price varies considerably but is uniformly high as it is used all over the highlands by the Quechuas who work in the mines and railroads. There is more of it to be found growing on the plantations northeast of Cuzco and across the mountains on the slopes east from there.

You would have to get down into the Amazon basin for rubber; feathers and dried humming birds are found on the middle Yucayali and a portion of the upper Maranon. Butterflies are mainly exported from a portion of Brazil, quite a distance from this section. Sarsaparilla is mostly exported from Honduras, C. A. and copal is exported from Ecuador. You would have to cover a large section of country to find all these goods.

There is a plant for extracting the alkaloid from coca leaves in Peru, a small place that extracts about a ton a year, much of which is used locally and the balance of which goes to Europe. You can not import cocaine into this country as an individual without resorting to smuggling. You can find out the duty of the others by writing to Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Washington, D. C., who will tell you the amount imported this year and the declared price per pound, or per container.

A Geographical Anomaly

PERHAPS you will have to consult your map to visualize this one.

Request:—"Please tell me the compass direction of the Panama Canal from the Atlantic to the Pacific. How deep was the deepest cut? How wide at the bottom and how wide at the top or, in other words, at what slope was the deepest cut trimmed off?"—Ed. R. Burns, St. Louis, Mo.

Reply, by Mr. Charles Bell Emerson:—The general course of the Panama Canal from the Atlantic entrance on Limon Bay is southeastward to the Pacific side of the Isthmus, or in other words you are further *east* when in Panama City on the Pacific coast than you are when in Colon on the Atlantic coast! This may not seem to be correct to many people, but nevertheless it is a fact.

The height of the Continental Divide at the point where it was cut for canal was about 335 feet above sea level. Gold Hill is the highest point alongside of the channel, and rises 540 feet. The length of the canal from deep water to deep water is 43.8 nautical miles (6,080 ft. in nautical mile, as compared with 5,280 ft. in a land mile). A sea level stretch of 5.77 miles from the entrance leads to Gatun Locks, rising by 3 steps to Gatun Lake, which is 85 ft. above sea level.

Addendum

THE FOLLOWING properly belongs with Victor Shaw's exposition on "Tungsten" that appeared in these columns last issue.

In 1925, the Wolf Tongue Mine at Boulder, Colorado, output was 173 tons of 60% concentrates. In Arizona that year, the Hummel Wilson Tungsten Co. operated a new 25-ton mill near Arivaca on hubernite tungsten. The other properties given above also worked. In 1926-27, all these properties operated with increased output, the Boulder company making around 200 tons, of which a portion as in '25 was ore from adjacent mines. This year the mine at Mill City, Nevada, was the principal producer, as it was also last year (1928).

The above is to show increasing activity.

We are now importing principally from China.

Principal uses of this metal at present are: chiefly in furnishing high-speed cutting tools and for incandescent lamp filaments. If this, like common metals, depended on large and cheap production it would have little comparative value; but its use makes such enormous saving that its relative value economically places it on a par with lead and zinc, and only just below iron and copper. Several new alloys have been recently exploited which seem to indicate increased demand in future. Two of these are "hastellite" a chromium-carbon alloy; and "carboloy", a cobalt-carbon alloy. The latter seems most important. It will cut chilled castings, glass, porcelain, and even quartz. At high speed it also cuts hard rubber, bakelite, and mycalex which destroys the edge of ordinary high speed steel.

As to the future importance of tungsten, it is doubtful if it will reach *major* proportions although that is not predictable. It is, however, fairly certain to remain a most valuable metal with steady demand

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Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.
2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.
3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.
4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait casting-outfits; fishing-trips.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Small Boating *Skiff, outboard small launch river and lake tripping and cruising.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, California.

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Yachting HENRY W. RUBINKAM, Chicago Yacht Club, Box 507, Chicago, Ill.

Motor Boating GEORGE W. SUTTON, 232 Madison Ave., Room 801, New York City.

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Edged Weapons, *pole arms and armor.*—ROBERT E. GARDNER, 429 Wilson Ave., Columbus, Ohio.

First Aid on the Trail *Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Health hazard of the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Health-Building Outdoors *How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel, right exercise, food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE.

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Forestry in the United States *Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild animal life in the forests.*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.*—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Haitian Agricultural Corporation, Cap-Haitien, Haiti.

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada *General office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General Information.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign CAPTAIN GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Fort Snelling, Minn.

Navy Matters *Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. Maritime law.*—LIEUT. FRANCIS GREENE, U. S. N. R., 231 Eleventh St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

U. S. Marine Corps LIEUT. F. W. HOPKINS, Marine Corps Fleet Reserve, Box 1042, Medford, Oregon.

Aviation *Airplanes; airships; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions on stock promotion.*—LIEUTENANT JEFFREY R. STARKS, 1408 "N" Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

State Police FRANCIS H. BENT, JR., 117 North Boulevard, Deland, Fla.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police PATRICK LEE, c/o William H. Souls, 1481 Beacon St., Boston, Massachusetts.

Horses *Care, breeding, training of horses in general; hunting, jumping, and polo; horses of the old and new West.*—THOMAS H. DAMERON, 7 Block "S", Pueblo, Colo.

Dogs JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Cal.

Taxidermy SETH BULLOCK, care *Adventure.*

Herpetology *General information concerning reptiles and amphibians; their customs, habits and distribution.*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, American Museum of Natural History, New York, N. Y.

Entomology *General information about insects and spiders; venomous insects, disease-carrying insects, insects attacking man, etc.*—DR. FRANK E. LUTZ, Ramsey, N. J.

Ichthyology GEORGE S. MYERS, Stanford University, Box 821, Calif.

Stamps H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J

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Old Songs That Men Have Sung ROBERT W. GORDON, care of *Adventure.*

Track JACKSON SCHOLZ, 73 Farmington Ave., Longmeadow, Mass.

Tennis FRED HAWTHORNE, Sports Dept., New York *Herald Tribune,* New York City.

Basketball JOE F. CARR, 16 E. Broad St., Columbus, Ohio.

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Swimming LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 260 Washington St., N. Y. C.

Skating FRANK SCHREIBER, 2226 Clinton Ave., Berwyn, Ill.

Skiing and Snowshoeing W. H. PRICE, 3436 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec.

Hockey "DANIEL," *The Evening Telegram,* 73 Dey St., New York City.

Archery EARL B. POWELL, 524 West 3rd St., Los Angeles, Cal.

Boxing JAMES P. DAWSON, The New York *Times,* Times Square, New York City.

Fencing JOHN V. GROMBACH, 1061 Madison Ave., New York City.

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The Sea Part 2 *Statistics and records of American shipping; names, tonnages, dimensions, service, crews, owners of all American documented steam, motor, sail, yacht and unrigged merchant vessels. Vessels lost, abandoned, sold to aliens and all Government owned vessels.*—HARRY E. RIESEBERG.

The Sea Part 3 *British Waters.* Also old-time sailoring.—CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 4 *Atlantic and Indian Oceans; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits; Islands and Coasts.* (See also West Indian Sections.)—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

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Hawaii DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

South Sea Islands JAMES STANLEY MEAGHER, 4322 Pine Street, Inglewood, Calif.

Philippine Islands BUCK CONNOR, L. B. 4, Quartzsite, Ariz.

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★**Australia and Tasmania** ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge Street, Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

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★ (*Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for five cents.*)
✠ (*Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

THE TRAIL AHEAD

The next issue of
ADVENTURE
May 15th

NORTH *of* SINGAPORE

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

VESSEL after vessel vanished from those seas, suddenly, mysteriously, each with her entire crew and her rich cargo. Truly an exceptional gang of criminals must be operating, directed by some masterly and ruthless picaroon. Young *Carstairs*, secret agent, vowed he would find this man if he had to scour every inch of the Malay Seas. Read this thrilling novelette in the next issue.

And—Other Good Stories

RAINBOW CHASERS, a novelette of the turbulent days of a bonanza town, by HUGH PENDEXTER; TO EACH MAN HIS GAME, a novelette of the Army Flyers, by ANDREW A. CAFFREY; THE MERCY OF KUAN YIN, a delightful tale of a Chinese miser, by JAMES W. BENNETT and SOONG KWEN-LING; RED ARROW, a story of a brave man and an indomitable stallion, by RALPH HUBERT JOHNSTON; ONE MILE THICK, a weird tale of the Venezuelan jungle, by CHESTER L. SAXBY; RATTLER PROWLER, a story of freight-car silk thieves, by W. RYERSON JOHNSON; THE YELLOW GIRL, a story of the Java beach, by R. V. GERY; FOG, a tale of the Chilean pampas, by KELSEY P. KITCHEL; A BREATH OF FRESH AIR, a story of the World War, by WESTON MARTYR; WEST PORTAL, a story of the road builders of the Southwest, by GUTHRIE BROWN; and PART III OF HANDICAPS, a novel of the Kentucky racetracks, by THOMSON BURTIS.

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One of the 1,223 cash awards can easily be yours

PROBABLY you have already heard of this big event for amateur picture-takers. But have you made any pictures for it yet?

If you have said to yourself, "What's the use of entering? I can't win. I'm no expert with the camera," you're making a big mistake. The winners in this contest are going to be men and women just like yourself, people who, if you asked them, would say they had little or no photographic ability.

Kodak Film in the familiar yellow box is dependably uniform. Reduces the danger of under- or over-exposure. It gets the picture.

Technical skill is a minor factor in this contest. What the judges are looking for are *interesting* pictures—pictures of children and scenes, sports and animals, still life and nature studies, buildings and architectural details, interiors and unusual photographs.

If you live under the flag of the United States or that of the Dominion of Canada, you're eligible to enter and compete—except, of course, if you or some member of your family is connected with the photographic business. And practically any snapshot or time exposure that you may take during March, April or May, this year, is eligible also, provided it is received by us on or before May 31. There are enough classifications to cover all kinds. When we receive your entries we'll place them in the classes where they'll have the best chance of winning.

Any brand of camera or film may be used, but negatives must not be larger than 3¼ x 5½ inches and prints not larger than 7 inches in width or length.

Enter this contest without losing another day! Increase your chance of winning by beginning to take pictures *at once!* There is no limit to the number you are permitted to submit. The more you enter, the more likely you are to capture one of the big cash prizes. Clip or copy the entry blank below and *get your camera out today*. This may prove to be the most profitable advertisement you ever read.

PRIZES

Grand Prize of $2,500.00

11 *prizes of* $500.00 *each* 11 *prizes of* $250.00 *each*

125 *prizes of* 100.00 *each* 275 *prizes of* 10.00 *each*

800 *prizes of* $5.00 *each*

Totals, 1,223 $30,000.00

In the event of a tie, the advertised award will be paid to each of the tying contestants. (57 of the above $100 prizes were sent to winners April 1. 57 more will be sent May 1. That leaves 1,109 prizes for *you* to aim at.)

Only pictures made during March, April and May 1929, are eligible.

PRIZE CONTEST ENTRY BLANK

Name..... .....
(*Please Print*)

Street Address ....Town and State..... .....

Make of Camera..... ....Make of Film..... ....

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Enclose this blank or a copy with your entries and mail to Prize Contest Office, Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y. Do not place your name on either the front or the back of any picture.

For a program of delightful entertainment, tune in on Kodak Hour each Friday at 10 P. M., New York time, over the Columbia Broadcasting System.

While this page tells you practically everything you need to know to enter the contest, further details, including the rules for the Special Enlargement Award, may be secured from your dealer or from the Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y.

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Strange and wonderful is the feeling of alertness in the Balanced Lifetime° Pens and Pencils, for Lifetime° Balance has banished top-heaviness and finger cramp. Writing is effortless, yet three carbon copies may be made. Witness the Balance Test at your Sheaffer dealer's, then try these fleet, beautiful things. You'll know you've found Lifetime° writing companions.

Lifetime° Pens guaranteed unconditionally for your life against everything except loss. Other Sheaffer Products forever guaranteed against defect. Green and black Lifetime Pens, $8.75; Ladies', $7.50. Black and pearl De Luxe, $10; Ladies', $8.50. Pencils, $5. Others lower.

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